

The Church Question: Is the Church Essential for the Gospel?

*The Rationale and Vision for Church Membership, Church Planting and Church
Ordination as Essential to the Gospel*

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Topics on the Church Essential To the Gospel

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Introduction

I can hear it now. "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian" rang in my ears as I dutifully slept in on Sunday mornings. Or, "church is where hypocrites go" as I hypocritically soothed my conscience for not trying. And to both of these remarks, I was so right, but I was so wrong! This is in large measure what this small book is all about--a response to the many ways people tend to raise questions about *the church as an essential element of the gospel*. Let me explain.

After I became a Christian, the hypocrite issue was resolved. I realized that I was the hypocrite for calling church going people hypocrites. I realized my own pride and sin, recognizing that I was without excuse myself and in need of God's forgiveness in Christ apart from any works of my own. I was the hypocrite ever to think that I could, or *they* could, work themselves into the Kingdom of God. In short, I realized that the church, if it is anything at all, is a place for sinners first and foremost. And while these sinners are being renewed, they are accepted by God not on the basis of anything that they can do, but on the basis of what God has done for them in Christ. In short, the church is a place for hypocrites who are forgiven their hypocrisy by God's grace through sincere faith. And even a sincere faith is the free gift of God (Eph. 2:4-10).

And yet the church question still lingered. For even after I embraced Christ as my savior from the curse of sin, and while I began to go to church, I still really didn't believe that it was *essential* for the gospel. Oh, I wouldn't have said it this way, but I believed it and acted it out in all sorts of ways. For years, I viewed church membership as merely an ancient relic of human tradition and perhaps a guise for those who wanted to exercise authority over me for some personal gain. People who worked for the church did so because they couldn't find a real job, or perhaps because they needed the psychological advantage of working for a "nice" place. When I did go to church, it was to rest from my labors, not labor! And when I felt called to preach the gospel, I felt called to do it outside of a church ministry. I believed that the church would only get in the way of reaching those who in large measure had rejected the church as a source of moral and even gospel authority. So the church question lingered on!

Today, the church question continues to be raised in all sorts of ways. Should every Christian join a church as an essential aspect Christian discipleship? Is church planting an essential aspect of the Great Commission to make disciples of every nation? Is ordination essential today for an authorized ministry of the gospel ministry? Most people today would say "no" to all of these questions. The answer to the question, "Is the church an essential element of the gospel?" is being answered in the negative with growing fervency it seems. Most people view themselves as related to Christ less as a corporate person and more as an individual, as evidenced by the fact that most people admit and demit themselves to the Lord's table on any given Sunday apart from mutual accountability and pastoral oversight by a local church.

Surely, there is a great need to revisit the age-old question, "is the church an essential element of the gospel?" We should do this if per chance we are missing something about the full gospel without a robust doctrine of the church. We should do this if but for the simple fact that great sums of money and human resources are being wasted if the church isn't an essential element of the gospel. We should raise the question simply because it is in our Christian affection to be always reforming our faith and practice after the rule granted us by God in the Holy Spirit. And most significantly, we should ask the church question for the glory of God who has declared that Christ is head over his church. Is this related to a visible church--complete with divinely

appointed constitutions, governments and communal rites--or not?

What is presented here is a rationale for the church as an essential element of the gospel together with some application. If you have been hurt by the church, or perhaps just disgusted with the various problems that you have experienced relative to the church, would you be willing to suspend your judgment if but to reconsider the Biblical teachings about the church question? Maybe you blame the church for the problems associated with religion and have lost confidence in its purposeful existence. Perhaps it is because you have participated in a church and found it lacking power and truth. Perhaps when you wanted to be effective and active in reaching non-believers, you found the church to be cumbersome or even anti-evangelistic. Or maybe you found that the church seemed too preoccupied with turf wars or culture wars instead of focusing on the first things, as it were. Each one of these experiences is admittedly all too common and can understandably raise grave doubts about the church as an essential element of the gospel. But think about it for a moment. Surely we wouldn't cease holding a conviction for the family every time a marriage fails or someone is hurt by a troubled home. Or would we deny the institution of civil government merely because some civil governments have failed or our government officials misrepresented our interest for the common good? And so I hope that you will give the church question an honest consideration--again, because so much is at stake!

In summary, I will here attempt to discover the meaning of Christ's words about the church built upon the foundation of the apostles against which "the gates of Hades will not prevail." We will seek to discover that to have the "full gospel" we need to be involved with a local and visible church where God's grace is mediated through the body of Christ which is said to be "the household of God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth." I am reminded of Augustine's fourth century *Confessions* and a curious conversation that is noted within it where we are introduced to Victorinus and Simplicianus about the necessity of church membership. We are told about Victorinus who said to Simplicianus, "not openly, but secretly, and as a friend, 'know thou that I am a Christian'" to which Simplicianus replied, "I will not believe it nor will I rank you among the Christian unless I see you in the Church of Christ" (*Confessions*, VII.ii.4). We are here suggesting that we stand with Simplicianus!

Chapter 1
The East Meets the West
A Postmodern Search for Divine Presence

Every so often we encounter a special event in life that seems to beg for a shift in perspective. One such event happened to me about four years ago when an Asian student at Yale walked into my study with a heavy heart. The conversation began by his asking to borrow my Bible. He then turned to Matthew 10:34-39. As he read the words, “for I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother,” tears began to run down his face. I knew then that the faith of this young Christian had brought him into some unresolved conflict with his parents. As it turned out, the student had talked with his parents about being baptized as a Christian. In the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ, this student had rightly concluded from Mt. 28 that following after Christ in Christian discipleship has something to do with being baptized, among other things. When he communicated this to his parents, even several years after his conversion to the Christian faith, his parents made it clear that to be baptized could result in his being banished from his family. The traditional beliefs of the student's parents reflect a mixture of Taoism, Buddhism and ancestral worship. Their objection to Christian baptism was due to the belief that when a member of a family defects to another religious community, he should expect a curse to come down upon the family. Therefore, motivated by fear, they would need to find some way to excommunicate their son from their family religious community if he were baptized as a Christian.

As pastor, I was confronted with many conflicting thoughts. First, I could not help but reflect upon the privilege of being a follower of Christ. For here was a man who loved his parents, who was deeply traumatized by the impending loss of his parental relations, but who all the same desired Christian baptism so as to be devoted to Christ. He was in fact living in the surpassing privilege of sharing in the suffering of Christ even so as *to set a man against his father*. Second, and more to the present point, I was also moved to some soul searching questions. Was baptism really that important? Feeling some of the pain in this student, should I really counsel my brother to perhaps lose his family to

be baptized? What was so important about baptism anyway? Surely Christ did not mean him to lose his family over a mere ritual--or did He? Surely a person who had come to understand the gospel of Christ and embraced this gospel would not necessarily need to participate in the sacrament of baptism to be saved--or did he?

Ironically, the answer to these questions was at least prompted by the student and his parents--especially in the "eastern" way of thinking about religion. For interestingly enough, his parents were not so much reacting to their son's change in mind concerning a world and life view. It was not even that he had come to a new faith that could be articulated intellectually and even sincerely. What created a problem was that their son wanted to be baptized. Baptism, to the eastern way of thinking, represented entrance into a new life, a new community, a new *presence*. This entrance into a new presence of divinity might in fact offend yet another divinity that the family believed in. In other words, there was a sacramental and communal aspect to religion that baptism represented--and this idea of *presence* was what was essential to religion. As long this Asian student remained unbaptized, he was still a member of the communal society of his parents and in the presence of his parent's idea of deity. They would in essence say, "believe what you want, but don't be baptized." For to be baptized was to be truly converted, not just intellectually, but to be transferred into a new communal presence! And this made all the difference--which is exactly why this student, in spite of his parents' admonitions, wanted to be baptized. He wanted to enter into the presence of Christ--to be *in Christ* through Christian baptism. Baptism, more than a ritual memorial, was a ritual communion with God, a real blessing that he did not want to miss.

Whoa! Talk about a pastor being disciplined by his flock! This of course raised all kinds of theological questions for me. What should I counsel this student to do? In order to avoid the severe consequences, why not counsel him to avoid baptism while holding to a *personal* faith in Jesus Christ. Well the obvious answer is that to be a follower of Christ is to obey his commandments, one of which is the commandment to be baptized. (Mt. 28, Acts 2:38) But why? Why did Christ make this essential to Christian faith and discipleship? It seemed so arbitrary to me. Could there be something in the eastern way of thinking that is perhaps also Christian? Does being a Christian have a presence dynamic as well as a creedal dynamic? To state the

question differently, is there an orthodox presence within a sacramental and communal dynamic that Christ understood to be essential to Christian discipleship as accomplished in baptism? Hold on to these questions as we relate all this to one more context, the context that many today have labeled postmodernism. For I am intrigued here that the eastern way of thinking is increasingly the postmodern way of thinking--for better and for worse.

Today, many are noticing the postmodern disenchantment with simulation and what some have described as "vinyl religion" in the church. As observed by Joey Horstman, "just as shopping malls simulate the great outdoors--danger with amusement park rides, friends or enemies with talk-radio hosts--we simulate real life... and end up mistaking what is real for what is only artificial." Like the leaves on Walt Disney World's Swiss Family Robinson Tree House, so are the various vinyl replications that try to fabricate life as we wish it to be. It is this world of simulation that Marva J. Dawn has observed in the church without a gospel authenticated with *divine presence*. Dawn criticizes the church for worship that is reduced to entertainment and efficiency under the time clock, for instance. But why is all this postmodern, you might ask. Consider for a moment two fundamental characteristics of modernity--perhaps even its defining characteristics--and how postmodernity is in large measure a reaction to this. And consider how the evangelical movement is related to all of this.

Modernism, especially as driven by the German enlightenment, was first of all characterized by a trust in material rationalism. In short, modernism assumes that there is a rationalist explanation for everything. The goal of modernism was to construct a consistent worldview that could be verified by rational foundations that themselves needed no foundation. As for the evangelical accommodation to modernism, there was the race to rebuild a world and life view from the same foundationalist assumptions of modernity. Our evangelism would consist of apologetic conferences and seminars and public oration to present a conversion in worldview. When the modernist liberal demeaned orthodoxy from his/her anti-supernaturalist perspective, the evangelical fundamentalist reacted with its own foundationalism as summarized by the five fundamentals established at the Bible Conference at Niagara in 1895. But notice very carefully the selection of "fundamentals:"

1. Plenary inspiration of inerrant scriptures (literalism)
2. The Virgin Birth
3. The Substitutionary Atonement
4. Bodily resurrection
5. Second and bodily return of Christ

As one can readily see, the late 19th century premise of historicism was determinative in the selection of these points. You could say that modernity set the agenda for anti-modernity or fundamentalism. Yet both movements assumed the playing field of rationalism. So for instance, where is the "fundamental" of justification by faith, the Trinity, and the church--to name a few? Whereas the fundamentalists and liberals came to very different conclusions from their foundational premise--one demythologizing and the other evidentializing-- both were modernist in an odd sort of way. Whereas neo-evangelicals would say that fundamentalism was not modern enough--the truth of the matter is that fundamentalism was too modern because it assumed the modernist premise.

A second characteristic of modernism as driven by the French Enlightenment was a sociology of autonomous individualism. As noted by Thomas Oden, the goal of modern life was to be "liberated from restrictions, constraints, traditions, and all social parenting--all of which were self-evidently presumed to be dehumanizing. The social, psychological and political strategies and rhetoric of modernity all focused on a highly abstract notion of individual freedom., when modernity was sustained, covenant accountability was misplaced in the interest of subjective self-expression." Likewise, Peter Berger has noted how "the conception of the naked self, beyond institutions and roles, as the *ens realissimum* of human being, is the very heart of modernity. " Therefore, the gospel was defined less as a communal narrative and more as an individual experience. Worship was less about being transformed by the communal presence of God and became more driven by the private experience of those participating--albeit aesthetic entertainment or cerebral decisionism. In short, church meant something less than communion within an authentically realized social system of pastoral and diaconal care.

My point here is not to be critical of those within these trends, but rather to observe how from the vantage point of the postmodern reaction, all of this seems so

bland and even inauthentic as a religious movement. For if modernity was rationalistic upon the premise of foundationalism, the reaction in postmodernism has been anti-rationalistic upon the premise of anti-foundationalism. If modernism was *relatively* committed to relativism, then postmodernism is *radically* committed to relativism in that there is a radical distrust of reason as having anything at all to say in the end about truth. Truth is now attached to aesthetic forms, coffee-house style community interaction and sacramental rituals. And the question about how to know what we know is a moot point. It's in this context that we see a trend away from world and life view and toward story telling within a socially vibrant context.

While we will not want to endorse the postmodern epistemology--this reaction has exposed perhaps the great weakness of modern religion all the same. It's in this context that perhaps a presence theology will be more appreciated, for better and for worse--something the eastern way of doing religion has recognized all along. Now don't misunderstand me here. I am not raising all of this such as to suggest that we study eastern religion in order to be Christian. To be sure, many people are flocking to the monistic spiritualities associated with eastern thinking and the variations of new age spirituality. Rather I am suggesting that perhaps we have been too uncritical of western religion--a religion that is in large measure driven by modernist assumptions. And while there is much wrong about postmodernism, perhaps its reaction to the emptiness of modernity is the climate that will make fertile soil for a reformational movement aimed at understanding the Christian faith as handed down to us by the Bible. In other words, isn't it ironic that we might now live in a philosophical climate more inclined to notice that there is in fact an orthodoxy of *presence* and not just an orthodoxy of propositions? As evangelical reformed people, we will see in the biblical narrative that the two, both communal presence and proposition, are essential insofar as they define and express one another. We will see then that true religious expression is realized within the interactive dynamics of both social/institutional and ideal/doctrinal orthodoxies.

In summary, perhaps it is a good thing that many today want to know Christ, not only to adopt him as a Christian philosophy as one would Aristotle, but to be under Christ's power and influence, to be in His presence. Maybe there is a kind of postmodern ethos against vicariousness that will make biblical religion all the more

plausible for some. Just as more and more want to participate in the arts--say in learning to play an instrument rather than listening to it on their walkman--more and more will want to participate in the divine presence rather than watching it from their theater style pew. The Biblical way is what has been historically described as sacramentalism as distinguished from the Roman Catholic sacerdotalism. And without biblical regulation and definition, you can bet that the postmodern ethos will create its own sacramentalism of an altogether idolatrous type. This is all the more reason why a conversation about ecclesiology, which is basically a conversation about the doctrine of divine presence, is so important. Even as the postmodern person is bored with simulation, we need desperately to see the Biblical idea of *koinonia*. This fellowship is of not the kind that is printed on Hallmark cards, but the kind that deals with the real stuff of life--the kind of care-giving that involves one's time, energy, money and possessions. This fellowship is expressed in the kind of conversation that takes the time to understand. And all of this is biblically motivated and defined by a kind of covenant meal entered into by way of a covenant baptism that saves wherein Christ "fills all in all."

We see then how our eastern friends and the postmodern way of thinking put this conversation into perspective. Our primary goal will be to demonstrate that the "full" gospel in every redemptive era including our own always requires a divinely appointed mediation of saving presence. The church then, as the authentic expression of this presence, is shown to be essential to the gospel. And yet as an aside, we see now that our world may be listening--listening to discover if the church will be willing to see its own idolatry of modernity and correct itself for a more authentic expression of the gospel. I am suggesting here that more and more Christians will long for Christ's body. But some will note that Christ is ascended unto heaven where he is seated at the right hand of God. Where then is Christ's body that *fills all in all*? The answer given to us in scripture is this:

*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to **the church**, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

We turn now to why this is God's plan of salvation from the very beginning to the end.

Chapter 2
From before the Face of God
Human Excommunication from the Salvation Presence of God

The genius of the Bible is its narrative. The Bible is less a systematic theology or a collection of wisdom sayings than the story of redemptive history beginning at creation and culminating with the consummation of the new heavens and new earth. The history is one of covenant dealings between God and creation--most especially humanity and most explicitly God's creation covenant wherein God promises eternal life to those made in His image upon satisfaction of the probationary stipulations. The story told deals with the human failure to keep the covenant (or the problem of sin), God's promise to restore a people to Himself by substitutionary covenant keeping, and how this is provisionally accomplished in the successive ages throughout redemptive history until finally climaxed into all of eternity. There was, beginning with Adam after the fall, never a time when a sacrificial principle was not being mediated by God into the history of a select community for an atonement from sin. There was never a time when the gospel was not proclaimed and that this gospel was not most essentially the saving *presence* of God to work his plan of salvation through mediating structures. This *presence* concept is most perfectly and essentially the incarnation of God's Word among us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And yet this incarnation principle is shown never to be absent from the saving grace of God in every age under every administration.

Our task then is to so define the gospel from the vantage point of this amazing story so as to behold the "full gospel." The full gospel enjoys the *presence* of God with and for his covenant community, albeit at times His immediate presence, but ordinarily mediated through sacramental structures in real places with respect to visible rites so as to transact salvation to the elect. And of course, the story begins with man and women created into a great and cosmic tabernacle of sorts.

Genesis 1 tells how God, the great architect, built a kingdom palace as a dwelling place. For instance, the language of "firmament" (vs. 6) which is said to separate the water in sky from the "seas and rivers below" is the picture of a great "dome." In

Exodus 39:3, it means to "spread by hammering" and Job 37:18 speaks of the skies being "spread out as a molten mirror." This is also described as "shiny" in Dan. 12:3. In other words, this language is poetically describing a great dome over the earth, that of a great and cosmic palace where throughout creation God is shown to be acting as the sovereign king in bringing about a kingdom order. God then is building a palace from which he will rule, where the "earth is his footstool and the heavens his throne." Old Testament scholar Meredith Kline notes that "Elohim, the Creator, is portrayed not as a mighty warrior but as an omnipotent artisan, not as a cunning conqueror but as an omniscient architect" (*Kingdom Prologue*, p.17, 1989). According to Isaiah, God as "architect/artist" created the world "not to be empty but formed it as a place to *live*" (Isa. 45:18).

Creation then, as the creative expression of God's activity as artist/architect, became a kind of practical paradise for divine presence. From the wisdom perspective given in Proverbs 8:22-30, God is personified as a master builder. Heaven and earth are described as a "house of God," a palace of the Great King, the seat of sovereignty even as this is depicted with great *beauty* and *provision* unto *life*! So then, enter the "spirit/wind" (Heb. "ruach"). Literally, "the spirit" is said to be "hovering" over the face of the waters as with "fluttering" in the image of a great bird. This description establishes creation as God's habitat. Already God is present and in a saving capacity with respect to creation. For the context into which the "hovering spirit" enters is described as "chaos (NKJ "without form") and void and darkness was on the face of the deep." The same combination, "chaos and void," is used to describe God's curse upon the world awaiting salvation by Jeremiah.

Jer. 4:23 I beheld the earth, and indeed it was *without form (chaotic), and void*; And the heavens, they had no light. 24 I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, And all the hills moved back and forth. 25 I beheld, and indeed there was no man, And all the birds of the heavens had fled. 26 I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, And all its cities were broken down At the presence of the Lord, By His fierce anger.

In Gen. 1:1-2, if we interpret the context of the "chaotic void" in light of what is to follow in vs. 3ff, together with prophetic application throughout scripture, Moses' point is that pre-created reality not only lacked in cosmological order, but also a kingdom order! The presence of the spirit sets into motion a divine history of redemption--indeed a

prolegomenon to redemptive history. Notice for instance Isaiah's account of creation.

Is. 42:5 Thus says God, the LORD, who *created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth* and what comes from it, *who gives breath* to the people upon it and *spirit* to those who walk in it.

Of particular relevance is the parallel language of Genesis 1:1-2 used to describe the saving activity in the flood and the exodus. So for instance, the flood is described in the same language here as an abyss (deep) in Genesis 7:11 and 8:2. And the "saving" activity of the Spirit of God to subdue the "abyss" of the flood is also present.

Gen. 8:1 But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And God made a *wind* blow over the earth, and the waters subsided;

Moreover, the rare word "hovering" is used to describe the ark over the "the face of the waters" as in Genesis 1. Like the spirit in creation, the ark represents God's kingdom presence amidst judgment (see Gen. 7:18).

This saving presence of God in creation and in the new creation of the flood is later expressed using identical language to describe God's saving presence in the redemption of Israel from Egypt. And so again, the verb "to hover" used in Gen. 1:2 is used in Deut. 32 to describe God's divine activity as symbolized by an eagle, leading Israel through the "wasteland" of the wilderness. This word translated "wasteland" is the same word in Genesis 1:2 for "chaos."

Deut. 32:10-11 "He found him in a desert land And in the *wasteland*, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, *Hovers* over its young, Spreading out its wings, taking them up, Carrying them on its wings,

By describing the wilderness as "chaos" and using this verb "hovering" to describe God's saving presence there is no doubt that Moses wants us to understand creation as a prologue to redemption itself--most especially the redemption of Israel by the presence of God. And so we discover the saving activity of the "ruach" through the Lord's presence to drive back the sea in order for the Israelites to pass through the judgment waters into salvation.

Exod. 14:21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east *wind* (ruach) all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

Therefore the flood episode, like the exodus salvation, is portrayed on an elaborate scale as a re-creation event, and the decisive moment is the presence of *ruach*! And of course, the *ruach* of God is no less present to transact salvation in the New Covenant context. As promised by Isaiah, the Messiah will be the one in whom it can be said, "I will put my spirit upon him" (Is. 42) And we read,

Luke 3:22 and the *Holy Spirit* descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Luke 4:1 Jesus, full of the *Holy Spirit*, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,

Luke 10:21 At that same hour *Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit* and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of *heaven and earth*, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

Luke 11:13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the *Holy Spirit* to those who ask him!"

After the ascension of Christ into heaven, awaiting his final return, we are told how God established a new provisional order which is again established by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost described even as the new creation.

Acts 4:24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "*Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them...* 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit**, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

And would it surprise us that the church, that visible place wherein Christ "fills all in all" is described as that place where the spirit descends even as Christ has ascended (Eph. 2:22-23, 4:8ff). This "spirit" is the same "spirit" that effects the call of God unto salvation as described by Christ as the "wind" to Nicodemus (John 3) such that the baptism of Christ is said to be of water and spirit in the New Covenant. This will be identified with the entrance rite of baptism in the New Covenant as well. (1 Cor. 12:13, Titus 3:5, Acts 2:38) And if you read these passages as if you have never thought about them before, try telling yourself that they do not seem on the surface at least to treat baptism as somehow *effecting* the New Creation of rebirth as a *means* of grace when accompanied by the *agent* of grace who is the Holy Spirit! And would it surprise us that Peter relates the New Covenant rite of baptism with the Old covenant waters of flood and Red Sea (1 Peter 3:18-22, 2 Peter 3:5-7).

And as we have already mentioned, this same spirit anticipates the consummation of God's saving presence in heaven as it is written in Revelation, Rev. 21:1 Now I saw a *new heaven and a new earth*, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

The continuity is profound! The same God who brought salvation to the cosmological order--is bringing salvation to humanity! And yet the point here is simply to notice that when Adam and Eve were created, they were created into the saving and real presence of God. Their habitat was none other than the "house of God" wherein God effected his kingdom order by the power of the spirit and his word. This is what we mean when we speak of the "church." It is the saving presence of God, either immediate or mediated, wherein salvation is transacted! The Garden of God was the house of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. Adam and Eve were created into a church where it could be said that "God dwelt among them."

Creation then was made into a great kingdom palace as indicated by the presence of God's spirit. But this was not all--there was also the presence of God incarnate depicted by the gospel according to John as "the Word." And however else we think of "Word," He is described as God dwelling among us.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life and the life was the light of men... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth (John 1:1-4, 14).

And so we have the amazing scene of God dwelling within the created order, even described as immediately present both by the Spirit and the Word--as walking among the first humans. Returning then to the creation account, we also see how the created kingdom spheres of earth, sky and water under the dominion of humanity are submitted to the great King of Kings within the Sabbath framework in creation. The mandate from heaven to humanity was to both cultivate the created order and guard the mediated presence of God in His great and cosmic tabernacle. That is, in the creation of men/women, there was the creation of the *imago dei* (image of God--Gen. 1:27). The mandate within the covenant of creation was both horizontal and vertical as this related to both the "cultic" and "culture" dimensions of vocation. (Cultic is *not* meant in the common use today as a "false religion," but as that aspect of work related

to preserving the holy presence/reputation of God from defilement.)

Meredith Kline notices that "as a garden-paradise it would occupy man with the royal-*cultural* labor of cultivating its bounty and beauty. As a *sanctuary* of God it presented man with the *cultic* vocation of priestly guardianship." But even then, the probationary covenant with God was mediated through the sacramental tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We don't know much about that tree, but whatever else it might have been, it functioned as a visible sign and seal of the covenant transacted between God and the representative Adam at creation. And we all know what happened. And in the NKJ version, the narrative tells how one day,
"They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the *presence* of the LORD God among the trees of the garden (Gen. 3:8).

What is obscured by this translation is the second illusion to God's spirit presence as already noted by the same language in Genesis 1:2. We could just as well translate "evening breeze" as "the spirit with respect to the day of the Lord." It is the story of how the Holy Spirit, here linked with divine judgment, is present also with divine Word. It is the great "day of the Lord" where we are told a sound was heard. This sound was none other than the voice of God, characteristically very loud as heard at Sinai, Horeb and Pentecost. This Spirit/Word presence to enact judgment is the spirit presence of God noted in the Psalms, "where can I flee from thy spirit? (Ps. 139:7).

Here then is an account of God "walking" among them, what may be described as a "theophany" (appearance of God) in human form. God was again present in Word and Spirit--in this case to proclaim a curse upon rebellious humanity. And what do you think that curse would consist of as proclaimed by God--the Spirit and the Word? As anticipated by the creation story itself, Adam and Eve (together with their posterity) were literally excommunicated "from before his (God's) face." (Gen. 3:8) They were sent out from the church of God. We will see this description again in Genesis when Cain was "cursed" by God. And again, it was in terms that describe being banished from the presence of God (Gen. 4:16). This will continue through both the Old and New Testaments. In Leviticus 23 for instance, under the Mosaic covenant--the curse for violating the stipulations of the covenant is again stated in terms of being cut off

(banished) from the presence of God.

Lev. 22:3 Say to them: Whoever of all your descendants throughout your generations, who goes near the holy things which the children of Israel dedicate to the Lord, while he has uncleanness upon him, that person shall be cut off from My *presence*: I am the Lord.

Similar language is also used in the New Covenant to describe the curse in terms of being cut off from the presence of God

2 Th. 1:9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the *presence* of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

What was lost? Was it merely knowledge about God? Hardly! Was it simply a loss of creation harmony? Not only this. It was the presence of God representing God's protecting, instructing, providing care from chaos to kingdom order that was lost. This presence--a covenantal and salvific presence--was in the garden both immediate and mediated as Adam and Eve were said to have walked with God in their midst in the context of a sacramental tree. Forever then, the human race has suffered, not merely for the lack of knowledge about God, but for lack of His covenant presence! Here then we have the amazing story of a creation filled with the divine presence and the story of human tragedy as rejected from God's presence. All of this of course raises the question, what should we expect as a "salvation" except the re-entry into God's presence? Surely the curse of God against sin begs for a restoration of God's presence--and this is exactly what God provided in a mediated way to the elect through the institution of the Old and New Covenant church until He provides in an immediate way in the consummation of heaven. And this is exactly what we discover as the great hope and anticipation for the future by those being saved. The "gospel" or "good news" is stated by Paul in no uncertain terms as the restoration into God's glorious and consummate presence.

1 Th. 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the *presence* of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

The full gospel is having God in our midst, to be in the presence of the *living* God. It is more, much more, than merely a change in world and life view (although it is this). It is more, much more, than merely having an orthodox faith--it is to have an orthodox communion. And I think we all know even by human experience the

difference this makes, albeit only by way of analogy. For when was knowing *about* someone we love the same as being *in* the presence of someone we love?

I can remember not long ago visiting my Granddad in Atlanta. This ninety-seven year old man had always been a great source of stability, wisdom and genuine compassion for me, especially during the tumultuous years of my parents' divorce. As I sat in the living room with him that day, I couldn't help but notice how at home I was with him there in a room that I had literally grown up in. Wonderful memories flooded my mind as I recounted the great family meals and reunions, the marvelous pies cooked by my Grandmom with just about any berry or fruit that her grandkids could bring her. I remembered the wisdom sayings passed down to me as I worked with Granddad in the yard, only to be rewarded with a huge portion of chocolate cake. I remembered the walks and dropping rocks into the creek with Granddad's vintage "palushi" for the sound of rocks displacing the water below. And all of this flooded into my soul as I sat in his presence, participating together in "koinonia" or that kind of fellowship that requires presence! Being there in his presence was to know and experience him in a way that can't compare with my sitting here today before my computer screen. Sure, I know my Granddad now as I remember him. But his human spirit incarnate made my long-distant memories seem as nothing in comparison. This is *presence*! And we all know the difference between this and merely a cognitive memory--as important as that is as well.

How much more then is the presence of God restored? And as anticipated by the tragic curse of the fall, the gospel was always expressed in the hope of being returned into God's glorious presence. And this is exactly why redemptive history is most significantly the history of God mediating this presence for the elect, albeit through various provisional means, all of which foreshadow and anticipate the full and consummated presence of God in heaven. The various and sundry mediating structures or "means of grace" is what we call ecclesiology--the study of the church where God in Word and Spirit "fills all in all" awaiting the ultimate and consummate *filling* in heaven. And as would be expected, these mediating structures were carefully regulated and defined by God so as to protect His own glory among the nations. These mediating structures were always viewed as essential to the gospel, out of

which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. Consider then, if but briefly, the various trajectories of this throughout redemptive history, God's benediction of presence throughout the ages.

Chapter 3 *The Benediction of God's Presence* The Historical Narrative of a Mediated Presence of God as Essential for the Gospel

As we revisit the historical narrative of redemption, we are met with an enchanting discovery--how salvation history is the unfolding history of a community gathered into the communal presence of God. I am reminded here of Thomas Oden's interesting question about orthodoxy.

Where did we get the twisted notion that orthodoxy is essentially a set of ideas rather than a living tradition of social experience? Our stereotype of orthodoxy is that of frozen dogma, rather than a warm continuity of human experience--of grandmothers teaching granddaughters, of feasts and stories, of rites and dancing. Orthodoxies are never best judged merely by their doctrinal ideas, but more so by their social products, the quality of their communities... They await being studied sociologically, not just theologically.

Perhaps Oden has overstated his point--for surely orthodoxy is to be studied as a system of "sound doctrine" according to Paul. But I take his point to be that doctrine was throughout every redemptive period expressed through the incarnation of God, at times immediately but most often as mediated in divinely regulated sacraments. And if in fact the gospel would be "full," or may I even say authentic, then it will necessarily include this mediated presence of God as the *means* of grace whereby the *agent* of grace (the Holy Spirit) transacts His saving business with the elect. And this saving presence of God is what has in every age defined the *church* of God.

If then we can demonstrate that the true gospel this side of heaven requires the saving presence of God via these mediated and sacramental institutions, then we have demonstrated that the church is an essential element of the gospel. For as we study the scripture, we see that nothing short of a gospel that mediates a regulated and divinely appointed *presence* will sufficiently satisfy an authentic gospel where "Christ fills all in all." And clearly what is *not* here meant is the filling by an individualized Holy Spirit, but

rather that kind of filling that is explicitly stated in the passage, "for the church which is his body..." Perhaps then the best way to document the "full" gospel as mediated in regulated and visible forms throughout redemptive history would be to begin at the end.

It has been said that to know the future is to understand the present. In Revelation 21:3-4 we are told about the consummate manifestation of redemption in terms that describe a presence of God, not merely a knowledge of God (as would fit a modern, rationalistic reduction of the gospel). We read that "the tabernacle of God is with the people" and that "He will dwell with them" such that the benefits of salvation are brought by God to the people in an *immediate* and dynamic way. This is the way our scripture describes the climax of redemption and the ultimate *omega* of redemptive history--by a description of the consummation of *presence*! But what is even more noteworthy is that this description is clearly worded in order to reflect the pre-consummated description of God's presence in previous and provisional administrations.

The specific language of Revelation 21 refers back to Leviticus 26:9ff where there was the anticipated restoration of God's people as foreshadowed in the Old Covenant mediation of God's presence through the temple context. Under the Mosaic covenant, God promised to "set my tabernacle among" them. This of course was accomplished by the temple administration of prophetic, priestly and kingly kinds of ministries that were instituted during the Mosaic context. There were then the sacramental rites of circumcision and sacrifice (priestly structures). There was the government of tribal heads and church elders (kingly structures). And there was the ministry of Word (prophetic structures). God certainly dwelt among them such that the tabernacle of meeting described in Exodus 29:42 was later described as the "dwelling place" of God in Deuteronomy 12:5.

Under the New Covenant, this conception of "tabernacle" is mediated through different corporate structures related to the activity of the Holy Spirit for the church. Paul teaches that "we are the temple of God" and immediately applies the promises and exhortations once given to the Old Covenant church to the New Covenant church (2 Cor. 6:16-18, see then Exek. 37:26, Is. 52:11, 2 Sam. 7:14.). Paul's teaching for us under the New Covenant was no different than the prophetic teaching under the Old

Covenant, that salvation is described with the promise " I will dwell with them" (2 Cor. 6:16). This "dwelling" after the fall and before heaven always included some mediated structure whereby God, in a provisional way, was present to effect his saving activity. And according to Revelation 21, we are to see all this earlier history as climaxed in the return of Christ!

To more fully appreciate the profundity of all this, we should review the course of redemptive history with an eye toward these realities especially. And what we will discover is that in every redemptive era including our present New Covenant era, there were divinely appointed, biblically regulated, presence structures whereby it could be said by God, "I am with you" as transacted in a visible and definable sense. Most especially, the Genesis "beginning" will anticipate the succession of God's mediating presence as transacted through Moses and in the New Covenant's "foundation built upon the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone" where it is said to be the "dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph.2:19-22). To read the biblical narrative is to trace the multi-dimensional and voluminous aspects of the mediated presence of God in salvation history. But if only to direct your expectations in the direction of a redemptive-historical reality of a presence theology for salvation, an abbreviated review is presented here.

We notice first of all how it all begins with the declaration of "blessing." Have you ever noticed how big a deal the "blessing ritual" was according to the Genesis account of redemptive history? It was the kind of thing people would kill for (Cain and Abel). It was the kind of thing that would motivate mothers to instigate complex deceptions on behalf of their favorite child (Jacob and Esau). The declaration of blessing was the most celebrated activity of the death bed ritual throughout Genesis. So what's going on here? What was the meaning of "benediction" as recorded in Genesis?

Our present vernacular with respect to the word "blessing" would severely obscure the Genesis meaning. For today, we say "bless you" if someone sneezes--some say after the old myth that an evil spirit is being released--but today as a way of saying "I hope you are doing well" or something like that. Or we say a "blessing" before our meals. By this we generally mean giving thanks for the common graces of

God's worldly provisions perhaps, or maybe also a prayer for general well-being through the food we eat. And of course there is the "bless you my child" associated with a pious clergyman and a priestly kind of sentimental religion. All of these things significantly differ from the "blessing" that people would kill for in the Old Covenant.

Then, a blessing was more like what we know today as the "benediction" after a worship service. But again, even this may obscure what was being accomplished in Genesis and the Old Testament. For the benediction/blessing then was not as is too often the benediction heard today-- more of a doxology or even charge. It was a pronouncement of good and special grace favor upon a particular people being saved by God's grace, a pronouncement that assumes the saving presence of God in Word and Sacrament. For the most interesting thing about the blessing of the Old Covenant was that it was something that could not be retracted once it was given. In short, the blessing was viewed not only as a declaration but that which would effect the thing being declared. You will remember for instance the response of Isaac once it was discovered that he had "blessed" the wrong (according to his human will) child recorded in Genesis 27:27-40, much to the distress of Esau.

Gen. 27:30 Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in ... Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, "Who? Where is the one who hunted game and brought it to me? I ate all of it before you came, and I have blessed him--and indeed he shall be blessed."

The strangeness of Jacob's blessing is in the fact that it was viewed to effect the future, not just wish for it or even hope for it. It transacted a covenant, while remembering the covenant as well. It was certainly a memorial event. But it was more than just this--it was an event that placed God's saving activity into a genealogy given this Old Covenant context. It was a means of grace even as it remembered that grace! Somehow it set Jacob apart from Esau in a determining way. To further understand this, we should trace this blessing back to where it all began--with creation itself. And from there we will notice some very important things about what the blessing meant and how it was transacted. Thus in Genesis, the first record of divine blessing is worded as follows:

Gen. 1:22, And God *blessed* them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

Gen. 1:28, Then God *blessed* them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Before the fall, God pronounced the promised blessing upon creation as summed up with the language, "be fruitful and multiply." As stated in Genesis 1, the blessing is pronounced as a command contingent upon human obedience to the creation covenant stipulations. The language of "be fruitful and multiply" clearly looked forward to the intended heavenly climax of God's creation order as this will be more clearly understood throughout the progress of redemptive history. After the fall, God promised to take upon himself the responsibility to secure for his covenant people the creation blessing (Gen. 3:15). Genesis then is the beginning record of this as within the Patriarchal era leading to the Mosaic era leading to the New Covenant era. The redemptive history of Genesis aimed at revealing the faithfulness of God is divided into ten "histories" or family genealogies, one set describing the histories of those not included in God's redemptive covenant and the other describing the histories of those included (i.e. a framework of tension, curse/redemption). Therefore, whenever we see the "these are the generations of" language we know that we are about to begin a new cycle. So for instance, concerning the redemptive cycle, we have the significant language as applied to the Noahic era, the Abrahamic era, the era of Jacob and the era of Joseph (See Gen. 6:9, 11:27, 25:19, 37:2). Now the important thing to notice for our present discussion is that each cycle will contain a "covenant renewal" rite whereby the blessing--now secured by God's own doing--is transacted to the succeeding generation with the similar language of "be fruitful and multiply." So for instance, we have the following episodes recorded so as to include the great blessing language being passed down from generation to generation as testimony to God's saving grace.

Noah:

Gen. 8:17 Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh--birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth--so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth."

Abraham:

Gen. 17:6, I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

Isaac to Jacob...

Gen. 28:3, May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples.

Jacob:

Gen. 35:11, God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you.

Joseph:

Gen. 47:27, Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly.

And what do you suppose will begin the Moses cycle so as to connect the next major episode of redemption with redemption history.

Ex. 1:7, But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

Lev. 26:9, I will look with favor upon you and make you fruitful and multiply you; and I will maintain my covenant with you.

So then we should ask the question, what specifically was meant by the blessing language, "be fruitful and multiply"? And how was it being mediated during the patriarchal era? A good summarizing description may be found at the end of the patriarchal era with Jacob passing down the blessing to Joseph in Genesis 48. Let's look at this passage more closely.

First of all, the "blessing of Jacob" to the Joseph line is carefully placed within the context of Jacob's request to be buried in Canaan. As the dying Jacob makes plans for his burial, he has in mind Abraham and Isaac, the covenant that God made with them as passed down to him and the great and precious promises of land and descendants.

Gen. 48:3 And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he *blessed* me, 4 and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers; I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your offspring after you for a perpetual place.

Jacob here speaks of God's appearances to him in Luz, which was later to be called Bethel (or "house of God"), where he had the vision of the "stairway to heaven" recorded in Genesis 28. Jacob said of that meeting "surely the Lord is in this place... this is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven!"(vs. 16-17) This vision was most likely an appearance of Christ, the Word made flesh. The vision included a host of angels descending and ascending up and down from heaven to accomplish the blessings proclaimed by the Word. Many see this as describing the activity of the Holy Spirit. (See Eph. 4 and the similar scene under the new covenant) There was also the late night meeting with the angel of God in Genesis 32 initiated by the appearance of "the angels of the Lord." Later, one of them described as a "man"

would then "bless" Jacob after their meeting. Jacob named the place of blessing "Peniel" because it was said, "I have seen God face to face and my life is saved" (32:24- 30). And still again the divine encounter in Chapter 35 had all the elements of a covenant renewal worship service culminating in divine blessing together with the offering of sacrifice.

The benediction, "be fruitful and multiply," assumed God's activity of building a community ("innumerable people") who would enjoy God's special saving presence in a real place ("a perpetual land"). The blessing given to Jacob was in short the blessing of God's presence to transact his covenant, after which it was said that God "went up from him in the place where he talked with him" (vs. 13). Again, Jacob called the place "Bethel" as the place of divine presence both in Word and in Spirit. It was the "house of God." And even as Adam and all his posterity had been excommunicated from the Eden "house of God," the benediction of redemption was nothing less than being gathered back into the "house of God." This was the meaning of Bethel. This was the meaning of Jacob's blessing.

And so what did Jacob have in mind by his request to be buried in Bethel except that he was looking for heaven. And what was "heaven" except the place of God's presence, even that presence that had been provisionally mediated through the Old Covenant worship that culminated with the pronouncement of benediction? Bethel, even as with the future Canaan, was a place of covenant renewal and blessing complete with covenant renewal rites and the divine presence of Word and Sacrament. And significantly, it was a place where God was present in order to effect salvation through the covenant renewal worship services, not merely to memorialize it. And not surprisingly, Bethel had also functioned in a similar way with Abraham and Isaac before him. Thus in the dying words of a tired patriarch, the focus is upon a place of dwelling and his intense desire to be returned there.

Gen. 48:29 do with me mercifully (covenant lovingly) and truly with me and please do not bury me in Egypt. 30 but let me lie with my fathers and carry me out from Egypt and bury in their grave.

We see then that within the patriarchal period, God's saving "blessing" was to include a "place" where God would in a special way dwell among them. For the

patriarchs, this "place" was Bethel as within the future land of Canaan. In Bethel, God met with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for special occasions of covenant renewal (Gen. 12:8, 13:3, 28:19, 31:13, 35:1-15). And if the reader will go back and read these references, he or she will notice that Bethel was set apart as a place of meeting with God both by means of word and sacrament. Then, the entrance sacrament was circumcision (Gen. 17) and the covenant renewal sacrament was animal sacrifice at an altar. These rituals were transactions specifically instituted by God and regulated by his own rules. And most especially, the covenant blessing/benediction anticipated by the first creation blessing was being accomplished under the redeeming activity of God!

The blessing of Jacob then included all of this, even as it was being transacted in a set apart place as provisionally looking forward to a "place" where God would dwell among them--no longer mediated through divinely appointed sacraments and word, but immediately as he once walked among his created order before the fall (See Heb. 11:21). In a provisional and mediated way for the patriarchs (relative to the ultimate climax of redemptive history), God could say, "I am with you" in Genesis 26:24.

Gen. 26:24 "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for *I am with you*. I will *bless* you and *multiply* your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake."

And of course these are the words that Christ later pronounces before his ascension into heaven, which begs for some means of grace for this to happen as was provided in the Old Covenant context (Mt. 28). Therefore the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was a God who transacted covenant initiation (through circumcision) and renewal (through sacrifice) in one and the same place--Bethel. And to each, the covenant blessing was re-instituted in the familiar phrase, stated in various forms--"be fruitful and multiply." Jacob shared in the patriarchal hope of covenant fulfillment regarding the promised land of Canaan. The promised land, especially as this anticipates the Mosaic context of fulfillment, represented the blessing of God to his covenant people in giving them a *home* in God's salvific presence. Jacob's emphatic and repeated insistence that he must be buried with his forebears in Canaan highlights something about the meaning of "blessing" throughout the remainder of

redemptive history. To be blessed was to be counted among the people that enjoyed God's special protection, revelation and home.

Before we then move to the Mosaic era, look at the explicit language that Jacob used in his benediction to Joseph and his sons. We discover in the most clear of terms how "blessing" assumed divine presence as had been mediated in covenant renewal forms and rituals anticipating heaven. Jacob speaks of "The God before whom his ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked." To walk with God in the Old Testament was most especially to be counted in the covenant of God--a covenant that was related to being in the saving presence of God as we have seen. Thus Enoch and Noah "walked with God" (Gen. 5:22, 6:9) much the way Isaac "walked" with Abraham—in his presence (Gen. 22:8). This would surely be evidenced by a walk of obedience. But most especially, it was a walk in God's provision as noted by the second aspect of Jacob's blessing. Jacob related this "walking with God" as being related to the shepherding activity of God: *The Shepherd all of his life to this day.*

This is the first time the "shepherd" imagery as applied to God's saving activity is used in scripture. It would have readily been appreciated by the herdsman culture of the Israelite people in that day. A shepherd provided pasture for the sheep, kept away wild animals, and kept the sheep together so they would be fruitful and multiply. The shepherd would dwell with the sheep in order to do this. Notice for instance the different associations given to the shepherding activity of God later in redemptive history.

Gen. 49:24

Yet his bow remained taut, and his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the name of the **Shepherd**, the Rock of Israel,

Num. 27:17

who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep without a **shepherd.**"

2Sam. 5:2

For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be **shepherd** of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel."

Pss. 23:1 The LORD is my **shepherd**, I shall not want.

And finally, Jacob's benediction was related to the saving/redeeming activity of God: *The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm.* The language here of "the angel" in the Old Testament is often used in association with those angels who would

accompany God (19:1). But it also speaks of "the angel of God/the Lord" or as in here, "the angel" (with the article in the singular) who is an appearance of God in human form (note 16:7). Typically, in moments of personal or national crisis--the angel is a "rescuer" or literally, a "redeemer." Therefore, the reference here is most likely a reference to the theophany of God as redeemer--or perhaps better an Old Covenant Christophany! Here, as in Psalm 77:15, Jacob recounts God's redemption throughout the history of the patriarchs using language that will later describe the activity of God in the exodus (Ex. 6:6, Ex. 15:13). This Hebrew word as translated into Greek in the Septuagint is used in the New Testament to describe God's saving activity as accomplished in Christ. (See Col. 1:13, "He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.")

Therefore, the blessing of Jacob, the blessing that people would literally kill for, was none other than the blessing of salvation as being mediated through redemptive history in real places and with sacramental rites together with divine Word. The patriarchal "place" anticipates Canaan under the Mosaic context (level one of fulfillment), of the church gathered around word and sacrament after pentecost (level two) and heaven itself in the consummated context (level three of fulfillment--Heb. 11:21). All of this begs for a "place of presence" under the Mosaic context and later under the "last days" context awaiting the consummation of what was begun with Christ first coming and God *with us*. This "place" was a place of benediction no less--the effecting benediction of God unto salvation.

The account given in Genesis 48 records the last time God spoke to the patriarchs. The next recorded revelation takes place to Moses. Just as the language in Genesis 48:2 makes use of the significant repetition, "Jacob, Jacob" to which Jacob replies "Here I am," so too this exact same language was used with Abraham and will again show up with Moses (3:4). The language "I am El, God of your Father" links this revelation to all of the previous revelations and the revelation that will come to Moses as well.

Ex. 3:6 "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob..."

During the Mosaic era, there is no doubting that God's redemptive blessing was being effected (or transacted) through mediating structures. Again, it is important to remember that this is NOT peculiar to the Mosaic era--such mediating structures for Word and Sacrament were already in place from the beginning of the redemptive story. Whatever else will be in discontinuity with the New Covenant, in so far as the apostles argued for continuity with Abraham, this continuity will be maintained in so far as the gospel is mediated through divinely appointed rites, governments and word.

If then the mediating structures were associated with Bethel in the Patriarchal era, then under the Mosaic context the mediating structures were associated most directly with the place of tabernacle. Yet the reality of mediating structures was maintained. The tabernacle, albeit in the land of promise, would be a "house of God" as Bethel in continuity with the altar of sacrifice under the patriarchal era.

Gen. 28:21 so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, 22 and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that thou givest me I will give the tenth to thee."

The redemptive trajectory is profound. As revelation unfolds, we see in the Mosaic economy a more full blown sacrificial system than before, but the principle remains the same. Moreover, just as one entered into the covenant community by circumcision under the patriarchal era, so during the Mosaic era circumcision was a rite of entrance into the sacramental presence of God under the Old Covenant. In short, God was in a very real sense present in the tabernacle to transact his salvation activity in anticipation of the heavenly consummation! His presence then was mediated through such things as circumcision and sacrifice together with Word and prayer, all of which were present for the patriarchs. The trajectory of mediated presence is ever present! But notice also how this mediated presence was initiated by the immediate presence of God with divine and audible words.

Ex. 19:20 Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

As had been the case during the patriarchal period, the divine rites and covenant circumstance were divinely instituted by the immediate and miraculous appearance of God. Yet for the duration of the covenant, the presence of God was mediated. And this

again is what we mean by "church," albeit the Old Covenant church. There was then the church under the Mosaic covenant whose place was the tabernacle of dwelling instituted by miraculous revelation.

Ex. 29:42 "This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet you to speak with you. 43 "And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory. 44 "So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. I will also consecrate both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me as priests.

Ex. 40:34 Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 36 Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys.

The tabernacle was a place where it was said that God dwelt among them.

Deut. 12:5 "But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His *dwelling place*; and there you shall go.

Pss. 76:2 In Salem also is His tabernacle, And His *dwelling place* in Zion.

God was in the midst of his people, albeit in a provisional and mediated way-- so as to save them!

Num. 35:34 "Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel."

We don't want to miss all this! God was not merely a philosophy or doctrine, God was present in the "household of the living God" and his mediated presence was a vital part of the salvific plan under the Old Covenant. As such, the people of God could come into the living presence of God as in the following ways expressed.

Pss. 42:2 My soul thirsts for God, for the *living God*. When shall I come and appear before God?

Pss. 84:2 My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; My heart and my flesh cry out for the *living God*.

Surely David understood that God was in one sense present everywhere--but God also mediated his salvific presence through the worship of the Old Covenant church. Therefore, anticipating a return to the immediate presence of God for eternal life and salvation, God made provision for his presence as mediated through the ordinances of the Old Covenant. *Orthodoxy in the Old Covenant was an orthodoxy of faith, symbols, traditions, feasts, meals and word! These things mediated the presence of God! And so, God could say to his covenant people under Moses, as he did to*

Abraham, "I am with you..."

Is. 41:10 Fear not, for *I am with you*; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

During the Davidic period, this place of dwelling was called "Zion." And without a doubt, the Zion theology pointed to heaven itself.

Pss. 132:13 For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation: 14 "This is my resting place forever; here I will reside, for I have desired it. 15 I will abundantly bless its provisions; I will satisfy its poor with bread. 16 Its priests I will clothe with salvation, and its faithful will shout for joy. 17 There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one. 18 His enemies I will clothe with disgrace, but on him, his crown will gleam."

And so, just as under the patriarchal system, there was that wonderfully powerful practice of the blessing/benediction as under the Mosaic system. As before, the benediction always assumed the means of grace whereby God effected the things thus being promised--things for good and not evil! The benediction was a regular part of the temple service in order to pronounce and effect (given its sacramental context) the divine blessing of redemption that always anticipated the ultimate consummation. It was instituted by God as recorded in Numbers 6.

Nu.6:22-27, The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, speak to Aaron and his sons saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, "The Lord *bless* you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So they shall put my name on the Israelites and *I will bless you*."

We see later how one of the major priestly duties of the Levites was to "put God's name" upon the people and thus set them apart by divine presence for the blessing of salvation (Dt.10:8). The priests would lift up their hands indicating that the blessing was being put upon them by divine power and presence. The benediction, like the sacraments, like the ministry of word, was most especially God the covenant actor! This permeated everything with the activity of God by his Spirit. This blessing, more than a memorial, demanded the sacramental presence of God such as to effect the things being spoken. Again, it was what the Old Covenant church members lived for--to hear it proclaimed even as it was being transacted through the mediating structure of their day--that God was with them and that God's presence was one of salvation and not curse. This was the gospel then--and it assumed the presence of God to transact the

things being promised.

And so we turn to the New Covenant, where God's divine benediction is again placed upon the people of God, albeit with Christological fulfillment. The grace and peace of Paul's benediction to the Ephesians was given in the name of the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:2) and sealed upon them by the Holy Spirit (1:16). And how then did Paul envision this benediction being transacted under the New Covenant? Was the benediction merely a democratized indwelling of the Holy Spirit as some would say today? Was the apostolic benediction of God, unlike every other redemptive context, formless and void of the saving presence of God manifest in a corporate way in real places and times?

In Eph. 1:22, Paul states, "He has put all things under his feet and has made him the *head of all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*" The term "head" clearly denotes power—yet not just that kind of power that is of governmental authority, but also the ministerial power that Christ mediates "for the church." Power in this sense includes influence--the effecting activity of God so as to accomplish redemption (see context); it is Christ "with us until the end of the age" in order to "fill all in all." Concerning this "church" for whom Christ's headship is exercised, Paul notes in Eph. 2:19–20 that it was "*built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.*" And was this foundation merely a new rationalism? According to Paul, this "foundation" with respect to Christ the head of the church actually "fills all in all." And Paul then proclaims in Eph. 4:10, "He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might *fill all things...and he gave gifts to men...for the building up of the body of Christ.*"

The specific gifts that are then mentioned by Paul pertain to the leadership gifts of the church to represent the church's authorized ministry. That is to say, according to Ephesians 4:10ff, Christ's present ministry is mediated through His gifts mediated through offices in the church, "that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers in order to equip the saints, do the work of ministry, and build up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to mature personhood." These leadership offices are

further described and distinguished by their biblical qualifications in the pastoral letters such as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2.

So for instance, the church is described by the Apostle Paul as the “*household of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15). So, does Paul mean some intangible and “invisible” church? Or does he mean a visible church, definable by some visible form of government and worship? The answer, as discovered by even a brief review of 1 Timothy, is the latter. Indeed, Paul has been describing an authorized form of teaching (1 Timothy 1); of government (1 Timothy 3); and of worship (1 Timothy 2). It was of no small consequence to Paul that he gave instruction to both Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete to “appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5). It shouldn’t be any great surprise then to discover that Paul’s “standard of sound teaching” (2 Timothy 1:13) consisted not only of teachings regarding the nature of God and the work of Christ, but also teachings regarding the function and ordering of the visible church. For Paul, the church of the living God consists of a government, sacramental worship and confession--all three of which mediate the three office of Christ as king, priest and prophet of His church. This then is the meaning of Paul’s declaration that Christ is the “*head of all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all*”(Eph. 1:22). Notice then how the church is essential to the New Covenant benediction as fulfilled by Christ through His mediated presence today.

All Christians would agree that Christ is essential to the gospel. In the New Covenant, the three mediatorial offices of King, Prophet and Priest foreshadowed in the Old Covenant are applied to Christ. So for instance:

King

“Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies *under His feet*” (1 Cor. 15:24–25).

Prophet

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His son, whom He has *appointed heir of all things*, through whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1–2).

Priest

“And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices,

which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting *till His enemies are made His footstool*. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us, for after He had said before, 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,' then He adds, 'Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.' Now where there is remission of these, there is no more.' Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin" (Heb. 10:11–18).

It is important to see by all this that Christ accomplishes our salvation not through one of these offices alone, but through the exercise of all three, integrated within the one person, Jesus Christ. And now, in the present age, all this exercise of power is said to be mediated to us in the *church* as we look forward to the church of heaven. In the words of John Murray, "We cannot think of Christ properly apart from the church."

Perhaps then we should read the Great Commission with new eyes. With the eyes of those having read redemptive history, we see shadows of the threefold redemptive offices of prophet, priest, and king in the command itself mandated by Christ to his church such that it could be said, "and lo, I am with you always until the end."

1. As our Prophet: *Teach them* (by the authorized preaching of God's word);
2. As our Priest: *Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit* (baptism represents an entrance into the fellowship [communion] of the community that is sanctioned by the Triune God);
3. As our King: *To obey* (which presupposes that teaching is in the context of accountability by some form of government approved of by God).

The threefold office of Christ as mediated through the visible church is further indicated when one considers what the Bible teaches about the church's ministry.

1. The Prophetic Role of the Church—*Apostolic Preaching*

"But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14ff).

"I left you behind in Crete for this reason so that you should put in order what

remained to be done by appointing elders in every town....He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it" (Titus 1:5, 9).

2. The Priestly Role of the Church—*Corporate Worship with New Covenant Sacraments*

"And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *sharing* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a *sharing* in the body of Christ....You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons....For to begin with when you come together as a church..., For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you preach the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 10:16ff).

3. The Governmental Role of the Church—*Government Authorized by Christ*

"Shepherd the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising oversight...and when the chief shepherd appears" (1 Peter 5:2ff).

"Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears" (Acts 20:28–31).

It should be clear then that the Apostle Paul was self-conscious in his apostolic commission to lay a foundation for the visible church upon Christ, the cornerstone. The apostolic foundation included a divinely authorized government, teaching, and worship as related to the kingly, prophetic and priestly aspects of the salvation activity of God in Christ. It is important to understand the implication of what has just been presented. No sincere Christian would deny that Christ is essential for the gospel. That Christ's redemptive work consists of his being our prophet, priest, and king—again, Christians more or less universally hold this. Yet we also see from Scripture that Christ's three-office work of redemption is mediated "for the church" in this present age through an authorized administration of church government, sacramental worship, and confessional preaching. One must therefore conclude that the visible church, as

defined by its biblically qualified ministry of the word, sacraments and government, *is an essential element of the gospel.*

Therefore, the *Book of Church Order* for the Presbyterian Church in America affirms in its preface that, "Christ as King has given to His Church officers, oracles and ordinances and especially has He ordained therein His system of doctrine, government, discipline and worship, all of which are expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom; and to which He commands that nothing be added and that from them naught be taken away." And as we have seen, this has always been the case ever since the promise was made to Adam and transacted through the patriarchs and Moses. In the New Covenant, it is true that many things change. The gospel is no longer identified with a human genealogy as under the Patriarchal era. Nor is the gospel identified with a geo-political ethnic identity as with the Mosaic era. Moreover, both the entrance and renewal sacraments change from circumcision and Passover/animal sacrifice to baptism and the Lord's table respectively. But God is no less present as mediated through divinely regulated and visible structures so as to anticipate the ultimate consummation of the Kingdom of God in Heaven. Now we taste of the heavenly things not yet perfected in the immediate presence of God. Yet our benediction now is no less heavenly, only not yet completed. God is with us to transact his salvation. This is the "full" gospel. This is the church! And the church is an essential element of the gospel!

This is as good a time as any to distinguish what we ARE saying from what we are NOT saying. The result will be to not only distinguish the reformed view from a low church view, but also to clearly distinguish the reformed view from especially the Roman Catholic position. This is perfectly illustrated by the Westminster Confession of Faith chapter on Christian baptism (28.5,6). Having established that Baptism is a means of grace such as to be used of God to effect salvation to the elect, the following two qualifications are noted.

- 1) grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.
- 2) The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered;

yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.

In effect, as a sacrament according to the WCF, baptism is a means of grace as conditioned upon God's perfect and immutable decree of election unto salvation. In short, the qualifications noted refute any notion that the elements themselves confer anything upon the recipient in so far as grace is concerned. To say it bluntly, the element of water can do nothing other than get a person wet apart from the efficacious agent (the Holy Spirit) that works through baptism. There is no mystical power imparted to the external symbols enabling them to produce effects that are in any way independent from God's personal and sovereign benediction.

The above qualifications are equally relevant to all three marks of the church-- sacramental worship, confessional teaching and pastoral government. While each of these aspects of the church are "means of grace" they are NOT the "agent of grace." The three marks of the church then are not the agents of grace, but rather the occasion of grace when accompanied by the effectual calling of God by the Holy Spirit. The agent of grace is the Holy Spirit whereas the means of grace are the elements themselves when administered in the context of a true church and as conditioned upon the sovereign grace of God in election through effectual calling.

Again, by way of illustration, if the low church doctrine of baptism denies the means of grace in baptism, the Roman Catholic doctrine denies the personal agent of grace in baptism. If the low church doctrine sees nothing being effected by means of the sacraments properly administered, then the Roman Catholics see the elements themselves effecting grace in baptism. The reformed position then carefully navigates between the extremes, affirming the very real means of grace of the sacraments as conferred by the personal agent of grace, the Holy Spirit.

On the personal side of the church question, those who want the full benediction of Christ in this present age so as to be in His presence will want to be "in" the church where Christ mediates His headship to "fill all in all." This is the "body of Christ" in the present age awaiting Christ's bodily return. It is what we celebrate when,

at the end of our corporate worship, having met together in Word and sacrament, the pastor raises his hand and symbolically places upon the people the benediction of God. It is the practice in our church to always read a benediction from the New Covenant scriptures--and the reader may find it amazing just how many times in the New Covenant the language of "blessing" is recorded. Clearly the "blessing" of Jacob was maintained by the apostles for the church today, albeit under its New Covenant administrations. The church is not the agent of grace, the Holy Spirit himself is. But the church is the means of grace wherein the Holy Spirit is present to mediate Christ to the elect. This is the benediction of redemptive history today as the offices of Christ are made visible and real to us through the work of the Holy Spirit until the Lord returns. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen 2 Cor. 13:14

And,

May the Lord bless you, even as one who by the power at work within you is able to accomplish abundantly for more than all we can ask or imagine. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to every generation forever and ever. Amen. Eph. 3:20

Surely, the amazing story of God's redemption is the story of God's mediated presence throughout the generations to transact His saving grace. This in itself is reason to take the issue of church seriously. When we talk about the church, we are not talking about some non-essential and peripheral topic. We are talking about the redemption of God! We have need then to reconstruct a *vision* for that church that is essential to the gospel. For clearly today we have lost a vision for this kind of narrative for our own lives. And so the next three chapters will attempt to recast a vision for the church as it interacts with three very common modern scenarios. The first scenario pertains to the vocation of church membership, the second to missions, and the third to pastoral ministry. We will then attempt to rebuild a vision for each as it pertains to the church as an essential element of the gospel.

Chapter 4
To Join or Not to Join
The Vocation of Church Membership
as an Essential Element of Christian Discipleship

A person has worked hard all week at his or her "vocation" when Sunday comes around. What is a person thinking under a one-sphere conception of vocation--the civil sphere of one's job, that is? To put it another way: if this person believes that the paid employment of Monday through Friday is his or her *only* vocation, how would the person think about Sundays? Perhaps the individual feels a great need to recuperate such that if he or she attends church at all, it should consume the least amount of effort using the least amount of time possible. A sermon that requires careful attention and/or a liturgy that requires active participation is viewed negatively--for all of this constitutes "work." And the person explains, "I have already worked hard all week."

Or maybe the person brings his or her job-related ambitions to church and looks for that much desired inspiration in order to go back to work on Monday. She is thinking about a worship service that will motivate her to do her work, perhaps even to justify her drivenness about it. A sermon on excellence or the value of productivity would be welcomed. A sermon on things eternal under submission to the will of God--well, this might be viewed as irrelevant. And the person says, "pastor, when will you talk about my life?" Or perhaps he or she would even hope for a kind of divine workshop on how to be more successful at the job. At the very least, the person expects the church to be a "haven in a heartless world" to patch up his wounds in order to go back into the "dog eat dog" world of careerism. And isn't this even more strange, that the church, while bandaging the wounds, would never challenge the secular assumptions of the workplace that inflict the wounds to us and our families and by so doing support the secular system itself? Yet such is the church domesticated under careerism and a one-sphere conception of calling and vocation.

Do you hear the question? Today, and since the reformation, there has rightly been an attempt to reestablish the noble calling of civil sphere vocation--or what many have described as the cultural mandate. Responding to a time when the church sphere of work (viewed as "sacred") was viewed as the only noble calling, folks like John Calvin and Martin Luther rightly taught from scripture the biblical mandate for those callings relative to the *common* good to the glory of God. In the reformation context, the reformers were calling the people of God back to a two-sphere conception of work

rather than the medieval one-sphere conception of work as related to the church only. Our "calling" was taught by the reformers to include both a church sphere and a civil sphere, all within a divine purpose and for the glory of God. Yet the important thing was a conviction for two spheres--both the church and the state, the spiritual and civil under their own visible jurisdictions respectively.

As time passed, so too the original protestant work ethic was replaced with a more modern and spurious version. The original protestant work ethic for the common good was replaced with *careerism* driven by personal gain. Moreover, this careerism so filled up the space of life vocation that the spiritual sphere of church work was lost. Careerism is defined by Leland Ryken as "an attitude, a life orientation in which a person views career as the primary and most important aim of life" such that "work is viewed so as to establish one's self worth and becomes the controlling center of one's life and is the last in a series of priorities to go."

And so ironically, we are back to a medieval conception of work which consists of just one sphere, albeit the civil sphere rather than the spiritual/church sphere. In other words, under a one-sphere conception of work, what the person is not thinking is, "how might I offer myself a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God which is my *spiritual* service of worship?" in quite the same manner as Paul was thinking when he related it to the diversity of giftedness for the church (Rom. 12:1ff). Or will a single-sphere mindedness regarding vocation come to church asking "how might the grace of God that has appeared in Christ now instruct me as to how I might "deny ungodliness and worldly desires... in the present age?" (Titus 2:12). Such worldly desires that would include many of the very career-minded ambitions that might help a person be more successful in the world are strangely included in this.

The person holding the one-sphere concept of vocation will discover a growing sense of uneasiness if the sermon requires a sound and zealous mind directed not at himself but at God and His interests as they pertain to salvation for an elect people (Rom. 12:2). The person will grow weary of a sermon that requires work to understand. The person might even resent the church that asks him or her to help set up for worship or teach Sunday school class. But how does this compare with Paul's exhortations concerning the vocation of church-related work when he states, "Having then gifts

differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*" (Rom. 12:6). Even more onerous is the church that would ask this person to serve in such a manner that might require some training or exercise of skill that could even spill over into the week. Why? Because all of this amounts to *work* and in so many words, "I have already worked hard all week," which translated means, "my vocation and calling doesn't include a "churchly" sphere of work. And if I go to church, it is church as subsumed under yet another sphere of vocation. This is to domesticate the church under the civil sphere of work which is to deny the church a unique sphere of work as related to a "kingdom not of this world." Work itself is synonymous with "career" or "job" within the civil jurisdiction. Church work, the kind that every Christian has been called to participate in with respect to the gospel's unique "commonwealth" is lost under the power of civil or state-related work. A churchly sphere of work is subsumed at best, denied at worst, under this conception of life. This is to beg the church question today with respect to a conviction for the church as an essential element of the gospel and the peculiar "not of this world" kind of work relative to it.

All of this begs for a biblical vision for the vocation of church membership. And notice I said a "vocation" of church membership. Clearly what we are talking about is not merely having your name on the roles of a church, although it should include this. In short we are talking about a life calling so as to be integrated into the life of the church as defined by its prophetic, priestly and kingly aspects of ministry. Before we turn to some of the practical aspects of having a vision for the vocation of church membership, we should first review the biblical rationale for church membership.

First, the simple fact that there was always a visible church throughout the various redemptive periods of biblical history ought to incline us to be suspicious of any recent notion that treats the visible church as a non-essential element of Christian discipleship in our own lives. We have already seen this through the patriarchal era, the Mosaic era, and into the apostolic era. We have in short discovered that the church is essential for the full gospel. We have seen that the means of grace related to the three-fold offices of Christ as prophet, priest, and king are essential to the meaning of the gospel itself until the Lord's return. I will therefore refer the reader to the second and third chapters of this book for the first biblical rationale for church membership in order

to participate in the full gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the visible church has been and always will be an essential element of God's redemptive plan for his covenant people, the pillar and bulwark of the truth as revealed by the living God!

Second, since one aspect of a *credible* profession of faith is that the person be committed to obeying the commands of God in the New Covenant—many of which presuppose a formal relation to the visible church--membership in the church is essential to a credible profession of faith. That is, if a command is given in scripture that would be virtually impossible to keep without church membership, then the good and necessary inference from scripture must be that scripture requires some form of an accountable commitment to the visible church. (Call it what you may, we call it church membership.) Two examples of what I mean can be summarized as follows:

A. The responsibilities of the church-governors for the flock

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, *for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account.* Let them do this with joy and not with sighing--for that would be harmful to you.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves *and over all the flock*, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. 29 I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears.

1 Peter 5:1-3, I exhort the elders among you *to tend the flock of god that is in your charge*, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it...

How could the church officers (i.e. elders and pastors) practically be faithful to the above commands unless there is some definable "flock... under your charge?" In other words, how can a conscientious shepherd watch over a flock that he couldn't define in terms of membership? And how can officers know whether or not a person or family desires to be a recipient of this pastoral oversight unless they give some verbal profession to that effect? Call it what you want, membership, verbal commitment, etc.--without it, there would be no way to keep the above commands, thus making God's word nonsensical and absurd.

B. The responsibilities of the flock to the church-governors

Heb. 13:17 *Obey your leaders* and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing--for that would be harmful to you.

1Tim. 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching;

How would the flock of God practically keep the above commands without a definable and visible group of leaders. Certainly these passages are not saying that it is necessary to "obey" and "submit" to every self-appointed leader of every Christian organization. Therefore, by necessary inference, these passages imply that a person is committed to some definable society with a definable number of leaders. Otherwise, the command is meaningless with no real practical implications.

From these passages, in order for a person to have a credible profession of faith, he/she would need to be in some formal relation to some authorized church government in order to keep the above commands. Moreover, these commands render the visible church, as consisting of some lawful government, an essential element for Christian discipleship.

Third, the church is revealed to be an essential element of Christian discipleship by the simple fact that God established the church by positive institution. Consider then that Christ took it upon himself to organize the visible church.

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound [will have been bound] in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed [will have been loosed] in heaven" (Matthew 16:15–19).

From the context, we know that Jesus is looking forward to His atoning death and resurrection (vs. 21). How then would the long-awaited messianic kingdom be present if Christ has been raised up into heaven? How would His disciples remain under His kingdom power and authority? Notice that by Christ's own authorization, the church is provided with the power of the "keys" so as to have the authorized responsibility of "binding and loosing," which at the very least must include the authority to determine terms of membership/communion in the authorized covenant community. Notice also that this is said to be taking place on "earth" while being authorized "in heaven." No clearer language could be used to affirm the biblical propriety, even mandate, for ecclesiastical authority and church discipline. The language of "binding and loosing" as applied to the use of the "keys" is further clarified in Mt. 18:17–18 to be

the exercise of church government to declare them as outside the means of grace (“Let such a one be to you as a Gentile or tax collector”), later illustrated by the New Covenant context of the gospel as in 1 Cor. 5:1–5.

Therefore, this passage asserts that Christ and Christ alone is both the founder and administrator of the church, and that His earthly administration of authority is to be mediated through the form of government built through the apostles as represented here by Peter. To be under the influence of the church was to be under the influence of Christ’s power and authority. In Matthew 28:18ff, Christ’s commission to the church assumes that church instituted in Matthew 16. For instance, it is significant that the Great Commission was not merely given to individual Christians, but to those eleven disciples who had been given the authority to lay the foundation for Christ’s visible church. And how else can a person be a disciple of Christ according to this passage, except through *baptism* into a context whereby he or she is *taught* the whole counsel of God’s word and to held accountable to *obey* everything Christ commanded? That is, the Great Commission requires a visible church with respect to her sacraments (here the entrance sacrament is noted), teachings of apostolic doctrine, and a system of pastoral government.

Given this clear implication from the Great Commission, the only thing left to demonstrate is that Christ did not leave us to ourselves to organize the most suitable kind of visible context in which for this to happen, but gave instruction as to what we should believe and do as a matter of Christian discipleship. These instructions are the defining marks of the church built upon the foundation of the apostles’ teaching. And in this way, Christ would remain “with us until the end of the age.”

Paul makes this especially clear in his epistles. An explicit statement to that effect can be found in 1 Timothy 3:15. There Paul describes, *the household of God... the church of the living God* as “*the pillar and bulwark of the truth.*” We have already noted earlier that, from the context, it is clear that Paul means by “church” the visible society that consists of the preaching of sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1; 4:6–16), the exercise of government (1 Tim. 3), and the practice of corporate worship (1 Tim. 2). Considering the importance of these three “marks” of the church, Paul gives some explicit instructions about each so that “you may know how one *ought* [or “how it is necessary”]

to conduct [Grk: “manage”] the household of God.” How then could anyone think that membership into that visible society said to be the “pillar and bulwark of the truth” could be anything less than essential to Christian discipleship?

Fourth and finally, church membership is essential to proper participation in the Lord's Supper. This can be demonstrated in three ways from the Bible: one pertaining to the jurisdiction of the Lord's Supper; the second pertaining to the nature of the Lord's Supper; and the third relating to the meaning of the Lord's Supper. As for the *jurisdiction* of the Lord's Supper, it is meant *who has been given the “keys” to include or exclude those who would participate under the authorization of Christ*. That is to ask the question, who is the administrator and guardian on behalf of Christ regarding the Lord's Supper? Is it a sacrament entrusted to the church, or is it a sacrament entrusted to individuals or families? And if the jurisdiction of the Lord's Supper is with the church, we would assume it is the church that was organized by Christ and structured to resemble the foundation authorized by the apostles.

The question of jurisdiction is resolved simply by asking whether or not a person may simply admit him or herself to the Lord's Table, or if he or she should be admitted by an authorized government of the church. In the present context, where faith is often understood in largely individualistic terms, more seem to hold to the former, although this would be almost unheard of in church history. That a person ought to be admitted by some authorized government representing the church is true by inference from the meaning of “binding and loosing” in Matthew 16. But even more so, it is true if only by the simple fact that Scripture gives the church authority to excommunicate (*unadmit*) someone from the Lord's table as it represents communion with Christ and His church in certain situations. New Testament professor T. David Gordon explains it this way:

What is excommunication? It is the church barring someone from the Table. How can the church have power to bar from the Table, if it does not have power to admit to the Table? If we come to the Supper solely by our own volition, then how can we be removed by any other means? Admission to and exclusion from the Supper are by the same means; either our own individual volition or the volition of the church. Then, look at 1 Cor. 5. Paul does not say the man is to remove himself, but that the church is to remove him. How can the church have the duty to remove from its membership if it does not have the duty of admission?

Therefore, the language of admission is often used in the historic creeds when describing a person's relation to the Lord's table.

As to the *nature* of the Lord's supper, it is clearly a visible institution. Yet its benefits are spiritual rather than physical, even as Paul asks, "Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" (1 Cor. 11:22). The point then is that the Lord's Table is a visible meal to be entrusted to some visible community. Yet it is clearly not entrusted to families or individuals, because Paul distinguishes the Lord's supper from those other meals that are enjoyed outside the church. The church—not the family, state, or individual—is that "kingdom not of this world," a society whose mission is spiritual rather than temporal. By its nature then, the Lord's Supper belongs to something visible, but only that which is entrusted with a spiritual mission. Only the visible church fits this description. Since the Lord's Supper is an element of the visible church, it only follows that it should be administered by the visible church and in such a way as to not violate the church's doctrine, government, or worship as believed to be passed down by the apostles. But who better to determine this than the church? Again, it is the case that to participate in the Lord's Supper is to be admitted to the Lord's Supper by some gospel-believing church. This is, in fact, what it means to be a member, accountable to some spiritual government authorized by Christ.

Finally, church membership can also be demonstrated from the *meaning* of the Lord's Supper and the biblical instructions regarding those who would participate in it. Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 10:16b–17 that "*the bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*" That is, the symbols themselves both represent our communion with Christ *and* our communion with one another. Only the church can be described as the mediatorial body of Christ because only the church, as defined in Scripture, is the messianic institution established by Christ in Matthew 16. And without a definable group of people, our commitment to one another is merely sentimentalism without tangible expression—or at least cannot be counted in a definable covenant.

Therefore, to participate in the Lord's Supper without any profession of intent to be committed to that which it symbolizes and tends to nourish would be to defile the institution of the Lord's supper itself. What else could Paul mean when he tells us to

“examine ourselves” (1 Cor. 11:27) if he is not referring to our vows regarding our relation to God and one another? In fact, the context of Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 11:27 is 1 Cor. 10 regarding the problem of idolatry (our relation to God) and divisiveness in the body of Christ (our relation to each other).

Therefore, one aspect of examining ourselves before we participate in the Lord's supper regards our commitment to the body of Christ. Yet as has already been demonstrated, this commitment has no biblical and practical value without a group of people and government as defined by Scripture. It could be noted that the historical standards are clear on this question. For instance, the Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America rightly states about the Lord's Table: “Since by our Lord's appointment, this sacrament sets forth the Communion of the Saints, the minister, at the discretion of the Session, before the observance begins, may either invite all those who profess the true religion, and are communicants in good standing in any evangelical church to participate in the ordinance; or may invite those who have been approved by the Session, after having given indication of their desire to participate.”

With these four reasons in mind, we can say with confidence that church membership is an essential element of Christian discipleship. We can even say with Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (200–258), “He cannot have God for his father who has not the church for his mother.” As to the question of who should be admitted into church membership, the reader may want to refer to Appendix C. Yet a good summary is given in Chapter 25 section 2 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, “all those throughout the world that profess the true religion together with their children.” This we are told by the same confession, “is the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.”

So having briefly reviewed a rationale for church membership, what then should be our *vision* for it? Again, in addition to what has been said already, the important thing to remember is that it *is* a vocation. As was already noted in the above scenario, church membership will mean participating in weekly worship with a view toward the spiritual work of worship. It will mean such things as coming to church prepared and rested so as to give yourself to the work at hand. It will mean using your mind to understand a

sermon, seeking less to be entertained and more to grow in the doctrines of grace. It will mean seeking less to please the goddess of efficiency and more to participate in the presence of God as he is mediated through word and sacrament.

Moreover, the vocation of church membership will mean participating in serving in the church as your given abilities relate to the needs of the church. Notice again that "spiritual gifts" understood in this way will be less about self-actualization or self-fulfillment thought of in an individual sense and more about serving the good of the body as a particular body has a need. Therefore, the particular needs of a particular church govern your "spiritual gift" as matched to your particular and individual talents and training. In short, our model for work in the church will be patterned after Romans 12 and 1 Cor. 12-14 and the organic church.

All of this begs for an ecclesial understanding of Christian ethics. The vocation of church membership will mean that we think about our lives less in an individual sense and more in the sense of our organic union with each member of the body of Christ. In a most profound way, a vision for the vocation of church membership will mean that the true nature of Christian ethics is always related to the formation of the covenant community of God. We see that the covenant is given not to individuals per se, but to the community of faith--the church as whole. We also see that our entrance into the church was not by something immediately or necessarily attached to ourselves, but rather by that promise that is attached to the church. Our entrance into the church was as a person who had been entered first into a family community and then, represented by that original community, into the church community. Miroslav Volf has perfectly summarized the ethical implications of ecclesial ethics in his analysis of 1 Peter in such a compelling manner that I include a rather lengthy quote here.

The new birth "of the imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God" (1:23) is not simply an internal and private event. Think of its inextricable connection with baptism. Some exegetes surmise that the whole epistle is a baptismal liturgy. Be that as it may, a connection between new birth and baptism is undeniable--a fact with momentous consequences. No one can baptize himself or herself; everyone must be baptized by another person into a given Christian community. Baptism is an incorporation into the body of Christ, a doorway into a Christian community. Baptism will not do the distancing for you, but it will tell you that genuine Christian distance has ecclesial shape. It is lived in a community that lives as "aliens" in a larger social environment.

The new birth is neither a conversion to our authentic inner self nor a migration (metoikesia) of the soul into a heavenly realm, but a translation of a person into the house of God (oikos tou theou) erected in the midst of the world. It comes as no surprise, then, to find in 1 Peter that OT collective designations for the people of God are applied to the Christian church: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (2:9). The distance from the social environment in 1 Peter is not simply eschatological; it is also essentially ecclesiological (19). Its correlate is the eschatological people of God, who live in the world hoping for God's new creation, not "our own authentic little voice" nor some "heavenly home" separated from this world by an unbridgeable gulf.

Correspondingly, one must understand the "walk" (anastrophe) of Christians which 1 Peter so strongly emphasizes (1:15, 17, 18; 2:12; 3:1, 2, 16) not as private morality instructing how to purify the soul from an evil world nor how to "love yourself and be gentle with yourself. . . take care of each other," but as an ecclesial way of being that is distinct from the way of being of the society at large. "Walk" is the way the Christian community lives in the world. Wherever Christians find themselves--alone or with other believers--a Christian social difference is manifest there. Communities of those who are born anew and follow Christ live an alternative way of life within the political, ethnic, religious, and cultural institutions of the larger society.

We are, in short, meant to have a corporate identity rather than an individual identity--which means that New Testament ethics is most profoundly "ecclesial ethics" in the way we order our lives relative to a community of faith. The evidence is startling. How, for instance, would Paul define ethics? He summarized it as walking in love after the imitation of Christ. (Eph. 5:1-2, Gal. 5:13-14) How does Paul relate to persons except in so far as they are one among many members of the household of God? (Eph. 2:19-22). Where is the temple of God today? It is not located in the individual as some would say, but in the corporate body of Christ. For those "being built *together*" for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit"(Eph.2:22). Paul is so very clear at this point--that our identity is related to the church under the headship of Christ.

We are therefore reminded by Paul that our spiritual gifts are not directed to self-fulfillment or as some would say "self-actualization." According to Paul, a Christian ought *not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think... so we being many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another* (Rom. 12:3, 5). This again

was Paul's point in thinking about that perfect love in 1 Corinthians 13 given to the service and good of the whole body of Christ less the personal gains of the individual. The whole discussion of love then is framed within the discussion of the organic nature of the body of Christ (Chapters 12 and 14). Indeed, I find it almost amazing that so many today will think of ethics in ways that almost entirely relate to personal holiness rather than the kind of holiness that is measured in how we live so as to be a blessing to the community of faith.

Thank of the difference this makes. Instead of asking, "is it all right for me to do xyz" we are being trained after the corporate principle to ask "is it loving for me to do xyz?" So for instance, while we might be able to say under a legalistic and individualist kind of analysis that it is all right to spend that dollar on a bigger and better house, it might not pass the test of love for our related spheres of family, church, and state to say that I can spend my money this way. Paul, therefore, given this ecclesial ethics applied to financial stewardship, would argue that those who had too much would then not have too much since in their giving, those who had too little would have enough. This ethic, he argued, would not be derived from a individualistic legalism, but by the "sincerity of your love by the diligence of others" after a pattern of the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that through his poverty we might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:8-15).

Our vision for church membership is driven by the simple yet profound proposition that we are *called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*" (1 Cor. 1:8-9). And this fellowship is what we mean by church membership--both in its vertical and horizontal dynamics. With this in mind, I pass on this very good advice to those who are yet members of a church.

In all probability my reader already has links with a local church and indeed is preparing to become a full member of it. If by any chance you are not, however, I would like to urge you to remedy this as soon as possible. It is entirely anomalous, if not actually impossible, to claim membership of the universal, invisible church without belonging to a local, visible manifestation of it. I beg you also not to be an ecclesiastical gypsy, always on the move from church to church, and having no fixed abode! Instead, I hope you will join a church, settle down in it, introduce yourself to others, and always be in your place for Sunday worship.

John Stott, *Christian Basics* (pp. 128–9)

Chapter 5

The Pillar and Bulwark of the Truth for the Nations

Church Planting as an Essential Element of Christian Mission

A Christian or perhaps some Christian foundation is approached for the purpose of financially supporting evangelism in the world. The peculiar demographic that is being targeted begins to excite the potential donor. But it is discovered that the evangelist's strategy is to plant a church under the jurisdiction of some denomination, and the conversation turns cold. Why? Because it is viewed that evangelism is better accomplished when not encumbered by all that organizational stuff related to creating a new and visible society complete with confessional constitutions, order of worship and form of government. Evangelism, in short, is viewed best when by an itinerant speaker perhaps serving within the context of some non-church agency. Why? Because the person or agency is not thinking about a gospel defined by the saving presence of God being mediated through sacramental worship, authorized confessions and pastoral government. Rather the person or agency acting under this conception views the gospel as *merely* a rational message that changes a person's world and life view or perhaps *merely* an experience that results in a decision to affirm Christ. It's not that the gospel doesn't include some aspect of these things perhaps. But the messy stuff of forming a new and definable "household of God" complete with all the pastoral issues associated with people in every stage of life is viewed as an encumbrance at best. Again, discipleship is viewed as an individual thing outside of the communal context that is defined and regulated by God himself as a means of grace.

Do you hear the question? And how does this scenario measure up to the great evangelist Paul in the New Testament and especially the record of evangelism in Acts? Did Paul consider his work completed when converts were made? Not at all! Rather he made it his business to finish the task by appointing elders in the places where he had seen a harvest (Acts 14:23). The ultimate object of his labors was new churches. And while we clearly see preaching as one of the means used by the apostles in Acts (2:41, 47, 4:4, 5:14, 6:7, 8:4-7), we come to this striking observation in Acts 9:31: "then the *churches* throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified." In other words, as summary to the work of the apostles, what we see is that church

planting had been co-extensive with preaching. Numerous churches were the result of the apostles' evangelism. And when Paul instructed his young evangelist protégés with the "pattern of sound words," these words included instructions that concerned qualifications for church officers (1 Tim. 3:1-13) and worship (1 Tim.2:1-15). Moreover, these instructions were not passed down as Paul's personal preferences but rather as how one "ought" to "conduct oneself in the household of God," described then as the "church of the living God" which is " the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:14-15). This is the church question today that arises from the context of church missions.

If the reader is convinced that the church is essential for the gospel, then by implication church planting is the means and end of the Great Commission just as church multiplication is the result of the Great Commission. Therefore, the present concern is to unveil the biblical vision for church planting as this flows from the simple proposition that the church is essential for the gospel. The rationale for this proposition has been the subject of this booklet and will not be reproduced here. What will be discerned is the unique and special provision made in Scripture for church planting as was instituted after the apostles under the office of evangelist, albeit clearly anticipated by the work of the apostles themselves.

It is true that many people today tend to identify the role of the evangelist primarily with that of itinerant preaching and one-on-one evangelism. In this, the evangelist is either a kind of traveling orator of the gospel or a good friend who happens to be a Christian. In the first understanding of evangelist, some biblical qualifications or standards may or may not be required to be ordained by some sending agency. The second understanding of evangelist is merely a Christian who assumes the responsibility to "preach the gospel," so to speak. In both cases, the Great Commission is consequently not essentially about church planting, but rather about personal evangelism and merely the publication of a message. The gospel as such is but a theology without a church.

What we have seen in this booklet is that the gospel is more than a message, it is the establishment of a mediatorial body, the church, whereby the full gospel of Christ's threefold office as Mediator is participated in through the preaching, worship, and discipline of the church. What will be suggested here is that a distinction needs to

be made between the biblical role and duty of individual Christians to become “witnesses” and the biblical institution of the office of evangelist with the specific role of church planting.

That the office of evangelist even exists as one of the foundations laid for the post-apostolic period is evident in Ephesians 4:11, “And He Himself [the ascended Christ] gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors-teachers.” Notice carefully the use of “some” to introduce four offices here. In Ephesians 2:20, the first two offices are listed as relative to the “foundation stage” of building the church upon the cornerstone of Christ. In that this “foundation stage” has been accomplished, these two offices have ceased as with the cessation of apostolic canonization.

What then do we make of the latter two offices in Ephesians 4:11? If but by the logic inherent in the order, it is possible to discern a role differentiation between church planting (evangelist) and church pastoring-teaching. This is supported by the roles assigned to evangelists Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:1–5). Notice that in both cases, their assignment included both the preaching of the gospel and the appointing of elders in regions unreached with gospel-believing churches. While the offices of evangelist and pastor-teacher may differ in roles, they would both be distinguished from the “ruling elder” of 1 Tim 4:17 as one who “teaches.” Consequently, both the evangelist and pastor-teacher would need to be biblically qualified to “instruct the brethren” in the “words of faith and sound doctrine” as a “minister of Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 4:6, see also vs. 16). Yet they are different in that the evangelist is particularly called to establish/organize churches whereas the pastor-teacher would serve in established/organized churches. This is evident if but for the simple fact that in the pastoral epistles, instructions are given not only pertaining to the theology of the gospel, but also regarding the organization of the gospel—the evangelists were to be concerned with establishing a pattern of sound doctrine, worship, and government.

What these observations indicate is a biblical vision for church planting, established for the post-apostolic age by the apostles and written into the apostolic foundation itself. It was carefully secured within the foundation laid by the apostles that

the “filling” ministry of Christ through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:10) in the present age (after the “foundational” work of the apostles and prophets) is accomplished through church planting by those who are later described by Paul as the “elders who teach,” as distinguished from the “elders who rule.” Perhaps, to the modern reader, the distinction is subtle. But a study of the historical narratives in Acts as noted in the above scenario indicates that just as we see the preaching ministry of pastors-teachers anticipated by the apostles’ preaching, so too we see the church-planting role of the evangelist anticipated by the apostles’ church planting. There was an apostolic succession of church planting!

What all this means is that the gospel in the present age will spread to the degree that there is a church-planting movement. In our drive to accomplish the Great Commission, we would certainly want to be self-conscious in our desire to preach the apostolic gospel message of salvation in Christ. But we would also want to be self-conscious in organizing apostolic worship and apostolic government, as these are part of Christ's salvation. We are not merely preaching a gospel to individuals, but to those called to form an assembly of God's people, to be under the visible rule of God and gathered together for the worship of God (Heb. 10:22). Moreover, our purpose in planting churches is not just to preach justification, but to also preach sanctification, doxology, and benediction—things that require assembling together. And, of course, this is what church planting is all about.

In that our commission is to take church planting to “all nations,” we necessarily want to think strategically about how exactly to do this. Perhaps one way to think of church planting is to be theologically conservative while being strategically progressive. Allow me for a moment to think out loud with you about several issues relevant to church planting today.

Planting a Theologically Driven *Vernacular* Sensitive Church

The degree to which we will reach different nations is the degree to which we will reach different vernaculars. By vernacular, I do not mean language group only, but social culture. What follows is a digression perhaps, but an important digression as we think about how to plant churches, built on the age-old apostolic principles of the faith,

yet in a manner that will be understood and embraced by those targeted to the glory of God. The idea here being promoted is NOT to "do what works." Rather it is to translate a theology of the church (in its worship, word and pastoral care) as it will be received by the hearers in a way that is in accordance with the original intention of the apostolic foundation.

Every church planter will certainly need to wrestle with the question of medium and message--whether he acknowledges this or not, because every form communicates an idea. The message implicit to the medium will either work toward our theological vision or away from it. My point here is to recognize that there is no such thing as a valueless medium. Things like instrumentation in worship, facility, leadership styles, dress codes, bulletin presentation, length of a sermon, and planning process, to name a few, all communicate a message that is either complementary or disruptive to the intended message. The "sociology of knowledge" is in large measure assumed and applied unconsciously every time we speak and act. Yet for the sake of both our theology and our effectiveness in reaching a "nation," the church planter should attempt to be self-conscious about these dynamics. We notice how Paul seemed keenly aware that his message was being shaped by the institutions and culture that he targeted for church planting. In Athens, he accessed the medium of the Aeropogus. In Jerusalem, he accessed the medium of the Temple.

Acts 17:22 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way.

Acts 21:26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having purified himself, he entered the temple with them, making public the completion of the days of purification when the sacrifice would be made for each of them.

Even while Paul taught that *there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him* (Rom.12:4), Paul would also acknowledge about his strategy that

1 Cor. 9:20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. **21** To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. **22** To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. **23** I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

To the Jew, he assumed those aspects of Jewishness that would complement his

message and avoided those aspects that would compromise his message. This explains why at times Paul seems to go out of his way to distinguish himself as a Roman citizen whereas at other times he went out of his way to distinguish himself as a Jew. My point is not then a point of "do what works." Unfortunately, many today think that to discuss strategy is merely to discuss an agenda of pragmatism. Quite the contrary, to not discuss strategy is to most likely compromise our theology *and* our mission. Our commitment to an old form or strategy that once communicated the doctrines of grace may in another time and culture compromise our doctrines of grace. Paul seemed to know this and we should also.

All of this raised the question about the meaning of "reformation" within the context of church planting. One nineteenth-century church planter, pastor and theologian said it this way:

By conservatism [we mean] an adherence to *well established principles*, not merely adherence to old measures. Conservatism in the Church is not mere *measure-worship*, akin to what is in the cant phrase of politics, called "Fogiesism." Conservatism consists not in keeping the Church as some ship lying idle and rotting at her moorings, but in keeping her employed at what she was built for. Not in fearing the sea, but looking to the God who is as nigh at hand out at sea as in then moorings—and fearing not—even though God's Providence calls her to perform some great Columbus voyage, and discover in these last days the true solution of the problem of the Church visible, as a free spiritual Commonwealth in a free temporal Commonwealth—untrammelled and untrammeling—
"Rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."
Stuart Robinson

It would take another book to unpack what Robinson is getting at. In short, church planting should be theologically driven and strategically progressive--and the two ought to be complementary rather than in tension. So for instance, most people tend to agree that there is at least some aspect of the person's social context that is relevant to how we do what we do—whether it is style of worship, leadership, teaching style, etc. We therefore should try to avoid two extreme ways of navigating the relation between form and substance. We should avoid a kind of "do what feels good" or "do what is popular" on the one hand, but we should avoid the naïve thinking that we have been given in the Bible a kind of singular and "heavenly" style of vernacular. The message is absolute and eternal. The forms do carry a message. The elements of our confession, government and worship are given to us by God and never change. The

style that these things take in a given context will need to be developed so as to accomplish the same things relative to our culture that were being accomplished in Paul's culture. I will say more about this in our next chapter, but for now, let us summarize in general terms some of our conclusions.

Style in leadership, worship and teaching is a theological issue in so far as there is a message in a medium. Does this mean that God has an absolute form or circumstance that trumps all others--well, yes and no. Yes in so far as biblical orthodoxy ought to be driving our use of forms and circumstances. No if it is meant that one particular form or circumstance is absolute and non-relative to culture. So are there some forms and circumstances that would be unholy for one culture but holy for another? We would say yes. And what we don't mean is that truth is relative, or that those elements of teaching, worship and leadership that God has prescribed in scripture are relative. We are simply saying that a theologically driven manifestation of these elements will necessarily differ according to the culture we are seeking to reach. It is high time that the pragmatic impulses of both the left and right of a given tradition give more scrutiny to this sociology of knowledge dynamic.

In the mystery of God, He has made people to be different in personality, and to at least some extent culture is an expression of personality. Just as any given personality can be directed in sinful and non-sinful ways, so too any given culture. All cultures are NOT equal but so too there is some degree of relative merit to all cultures as derived from the *imago dei*. We need then to find a balance in all this somehow. Are we prepared to say that Japanese Nihonga is superior to French Impressionism which is inferior to Italian Realism? Some, under the banner of aesthetic absolutism, will try to say just this kind of thing. But it strikes me as well beyond the pale of special revelation--which then is beyond the things that a church can exact as a rule of faith and practice. Church architecture, musical accompaniment, dress codes and leadership styles will all need to be put through a theologically driven analysis *relative* to a given culture.

Let us then apply this to the topic of worship for instance--again, only in the most general of ways lest what I am saying be obscured by "hot" details. What would it mean to really be "regulative" in so far as we take as our *only* rule of faith and practice the

teachings of scripture as to what is and is not proper for worship. For instance, if liturgical participation is a biblical goal, what's to say that we should follow old English vs. the "Amen" version of congregational response? Or if the language of an instrument is to be complementary to the message of doxology, what is to say that a piano or trumpet is more or less suitable in worship? Should we worship in a house or in a gothic sanctuary? Again, a theologically driven value system will seek to understand how these things will be interpreted by the target worshiper. One culture sees snobbishness in a sanctuary while the other sees transcendence. So for instance, to say in the abstract that a Neil Diamond tune is necessarily "sensual" reveals the assumption that there is just one absolute culture from which this can be evaluated. Yet for the 60's person, perhaps the Diamond tune would be popular in worship. Perhaps it would be effective in bringing people into worship, but it might also invade our worship with sensuality inadvertently. Or maybe not. Folk music (not as though Neil Diamond would qualify) to one culture is too common for the message of holiness, but to another it is lofty.

All of this seems to mean that wise people are needed for church planting and church government. Nothing will substitute for church planters and pastors who are deeply theological even as they seek to understand the target culture into which they will plant a church. We will need that sanctified wisdom RELATIVE to our culture and biblical teachings in order to do the right thing. Here again, the subjective element of biblical leadership can not be avoided--it was even sanctioned in so far as apostolic succession of elders is concerned. But the subjective element ought to be principled after the apostolic teachings! Decisions will need to be made, but they will need to be made locally, with the help of humble conversation with others driven by our same theology but in other local contexts, so that we might see the weaknesses and distortions present in our particular culture.

As again applied to worship, we will want to always be driven to recognize that our worship is ultimately for God and for His glory and that "Christ is the Mediator by whom alone they can come unto God, when they honor Christ as the head of the church, who rules over public worship and when their worship is an expression of *their* faith in Christ and *their* love for Him" (BCO 47:5). Again, "the forms for public worship

have value only when they serve to express the inner reverence of the worshipper and his sincere devotion to the true and living God. And only those whose hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit are capable of such reverence and devotion." (BCO 47:5) And again... "the Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given his Church a large measure of liberty in this matter. It may not be forgotten, however, that there is true liberty only where the rules of God's word are observed and the spirit of the Lord is, that all things must be done decently and in order, and that God's people should serve Him with reverence and in the beauty of holiness..." (BCO 47:6).

A Connectional Model of Church Planting

What exactly do we mean by the "visible" church that we seek to plant? By definition, a church is visible when it consists of a number of people who are gathered on a certain day and time for worship under some form of government confessing some faith. This is in contrast to what is often described as the "invisible" church, consisting of all true Christians of all times and places. Yet this often-mentioned distinction between "invisible" and "visible" is often confusing since the "invisible" church *is* visible to God and always acts visibly in some time and place. Better would be a Edmund Clowney's helpful distinction between the church *as we see it* (visible) and the church *as God sees it* (to us, invisible). In heaven, these will be the same. Nonetheless, the distinction is traditional and has been distinguished as follows.

The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 25:1–2).

Unfortunately, and unlike the traditional understanding as indicated by the last clause of the above statement—some have seemed to speak of the visible church as somehow the lesser reality in Scripture and nonessential to the gospel as intended by God. Yet the biblical evidence actually reveals that this is not the case. In the first place,

the term “church” is *ordinarily* used in Scripture to designate the visible church. When Paul writes a letter to a given church, for instance, it must be delivered to someone; presumably it is presented to the group of people who gather on the first day of the week.

The term “church” is therefore applied to local congregations (Acts 14:23, Romans 16:3–5, 1 Cor. 16:19, etc.) and congregations connected together by a common government (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 21:20, etc.). Biblically, the term translated “church” (*ekklesia*) means “assembly,” which presupposes as primary the gathering together of a people around a common faith and practice for worship. The writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers to “not neglect to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.” The “day” envisioned by the writer was the day when his readers were to gather together for the sake of “provoking one another to good deeds.” In some sense then, the writer of Hebrews envisioned the “visible assembly” as primary to the experience of God's people.

Another observation is to note that this church was not independent of other churches but in a very practical and even jurisdictional way connected to other churches. (See Acts 15, 2 Cor. 8, etc). We discover a church that is connected, reflecting our organic union with Christ as our heavenly center. As discovered in the New Covenant context itself, we can speak of one church consisting of multiple worship centers in a given city or region. Consequently, to the degree that we can genuinely function as one with respect to our ministry of word, sacrament, and pastoral care is the degree to which we experience an authentically connected church. This has been articulated by Edmund Clowney in the following manner:

The scriptural model in view is the “city-church”... these are seen as unified churches under one presbyterial government but including a number of congregations... They are members of the church of the city...

... a different concept of “the church of God which is at Corinth.” Corinth is one place of manifestation (of the heavenly church manifest on earth) for God has “many people” in that city, but the church is not the church of Stephanas (16:15), or of Paul, Peter, or Apollos (1:12) or of Corinth. It is the church of God; therefore it includes those who are called to be saints and they are addressed with “all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus in every place.”

The organic concept of the church that appears in the New Testament... presents a more theological, Christ-centered, spiritual view of the church as defined not by one earthly hierarchical center nor by many earthly congregational centers, but by a heavenly center that requires multiform earthly manifestations. Earthly assemblies do not define but manifest the nature and the center of the church.

Within a denomination--those who share one common confession of "one lord, one faith, etc."--we should strive to include all types of people from all walks of life so as to better approximate the great "inclusion of the nations" commission given to the church. We want a strategy that will maximize BOTH the missiological advantage of "targeting" so as to bring the gospel to every "ethnos" (nation) and the ecumenical advantage of confessionalism and diaconalism so as to have genuine Christian unity as defined by our having a common Lord and faith. We believe connectionalism is the biblical answer to these two aspects of the Great Commission. And whatever else connectionalism might be, it ought to mean something with respect to the three marks of the church so as to represent an authentic expression of "one body" of Christ in the world. There are several implications to this. I will here only mention one that might be relevant to a local strategy in a given demographic context.

As driven from a theological vision of connectionalism, we might envision a multiple worship-service church reaching many different types of people yet within one faith, one financial plan, one shared leadership structure, one training center, shared youth groups, etc. so as to best approximate a biblical vision for confessional connectionalism. Why should we duplicate resources when we could share them? Why should one church be detached financially from brothers and sisters that share their common graces in a given location? We should envision a church in our region that transcends all human distinctions while effectively reaching all categories of people. Recognizing that some categories of people are better reached from within a given demographic context, we might consider planting multiple worshipping congregations. Yet wanting to avoid sectarianism in the church, we will maintain one government, one training and study center, one budget even one pastoral team so in effect to be *one* church of a particular region consisting of multiple worship centers. This, we believe, will better approximate New Testament context and its corresponding

theology of the church in conformity to the connectional and organic aspects of the one holy catholic church. Some of the potential of all this could include:

Greater potential to reach those pockets of people that are not being reached by a single demographic and/or location church.

- Greater potential for the organic unity of the church to be expressed in more authentic and personal shepherding, servant teams, pastoral care and diaconal sharing, across demographic categories.
- greater potential to develop genuine trust so as to reduce the "politics of suspicion" that inevitably flow out of the lack of real, personal relationships across demographic lines in the church.

Greater potential for an equitable and frugal stewardship of human and fiscal resources through the cooperative use of administrative, pastoral and even diaconal ministries.

[An multi-national strategy-- see sermon 1 on Great Commission Church)

Theologically Driven Values for the Church We Would Plant

When I was first planting a church, I was often found reading over what in church planter vernacular is known as the "POM" (philosophy of ministry). A POM, like a confession, is impossible to avoid--either you are self-conscious and open about it, or you have one but never recognize it as such. For this reason, it is better to have an open and self-conscious philosophy of ministry if but for the single purpose of allowing it the scrutiny of our theology for the glory of God. We confess a theology when we make it our belief. And what we believe is most especially done in submission one to another as we understand the teaching of scripture as within a church rather than as mere individuals. And all of this ought to translate into a theologically driven strategy that will reflect a common value system to be shared by the corporate body. What I present here is one attempt to think theologically about the value system of a church-planting movement. Specific goals and strategy will necessarily be relative to a particular culture and demographic reality such that it would not be much good here.

Five Driving Questions toward Church Planting

1. What kind of a church would we have to be so that Christ is given the highest honor, the most esteemed priority and the most respected authority such that in "everything He might come to have first place?"

He is the head of the body, the church... so that He might come to have first place in everything.
Colossians 1:18

2. What kind of ministry (teaching, pastoral care and worship) will glorify the doctrine of grace as by the sovereign initiation of God, the sufficient and complete accomplishment of Christ on the cross, and the powerful and effectual application of it to us by the Holy Spirit?

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God-- not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.
Ephesians 2:8-10

3. What kind of church would make disciples of Christ who love the people of our city/region--in all respects a model of good works--to adorn the gospel of Jesus Christ before virtually the entire city and throughout the world?

Show yourself in all respects a model of good works,... so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior. Titus 2:7, 10

4. What kind of church will genuinely discern and engage the culture we live in so as to expose the relevance of the gospel to people of different ethnic, economic and other social contexts living in a postmodern world.

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more... to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.
1 Cor. 9:19,22

5. What kind of planning will demonstrate our belief in the power of God--expecting God to accomplish surprising things when his people express their total dependence on him such that we boldly ask God to do things in our region that are so magnificent that we know we could not possibly achieve them in our own wisdom and strength?

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Eph. 3:20-21

OUR THEOLOGICAL VISION:

A. A Method that Is Self-Consciously Christ Centered

Nothing to compel, nothing to repel save Christ in all that we say and do...

1 Cor.2:1-3, *I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.*
Colossians 1:18, *He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning,... so that He might come to have first place in everything.*

B. A Philosophy of Ministry that Is Both Theologically Driven and Strategically Progressive

We are looking back while looking forward. We understand that true conservatism is an adherence to well-established principles, not merely adherence to old measures. We desire that all our methods be consistent with our theology while also relevant to modern living.

2 Th. 2:15 So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

Mt. 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C. A Ministry that Balances Theological Reformation with Personal Revival

Without an emphasis upon revival, "reformation" becomes sterile doctrinalism. Without an emphasis on reformation, "revival" becomes shallow experientialism characterized by misinformed zeal. We believe that only an emphasis on reformation and revival together can accomplish the Great Commission with biblical integrity and personal sincerity that brings glory to God.

1 Tim. 4:16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Titus 2:7 Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity.

D. A Communion with "No Distinctions"

We desire to be a church movement for all peoples whose shared interest is exclusively "one Lord." We therefore seek to reduce all unnecessary human and strategic barriers to our fellowship--for in Christ, there is no national, racial, sexual, or economic distinction.

Rom. 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.

James 2:4 Have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Gal. 3:28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

E. A Christian Discipleship Authenticated through the Integration of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care and the "Parish" Model of Discipleship

We believe that the full gospel is as much a mediated presence" as a rational worldview. Through the integration of word, sacrament and pastoral care, Christ "fills all in all" as our prophet, priest and king within a communal environment.

Eph. 1:22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Eph. 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

F. A Plan to Accomplish the Great Commission through Church Planting

The church is an essential element of the Gospel such that there is no better way to make disciples than to plant healthy, God-centered churches. We want to be both a church and a church planting movement.

1Tim.3:15 if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

Church Ordination As An Essential Element of Christian Ministry

A person is asked to say something about how she came to embrace Christ as her great Redeemer. Sheepishly, she begins to apologize since her story is something less than extravagant--at least as it concerns a modern and individualistic kind of dramatic conversion. The embarrassed Christian can't provide a spiritualized version of the "I pulled myself up by the bootstraps" kind of testimony so familiar to the American expectation. Rather the believer can only offer the rather boring (or so it seems) story of how faithful parents together with a faithful church "parented" her to Christ with no major bumps along the way. The Christian therefore declines an invitation to tell of God's faithfulness through her church and family with words like, "there's really nothing to tell."

Do you hear the question? It is revealed in how many today evaluate discipleship or conversion as strangely *more* authentic when *less* influenced by the church. Take for example the Gallup Poll taken in 1978 and the findings of Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. For in relation to religious institutions, Bellah found that individualism in America has resulted in a tragic reversal in how one understands his or her faith in relation to the religious community. As summarized by Bellah,

"For Americans, the traditional relationship between the individual and the religious community is to some degree reversed. On the basis of our interviews, we are not surprised to learn that a 1978 Gallup poll found that 80 percent of Americans agreed that *an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any church or synagogue*. From the traditional point of view, this is a strange statement--it is precisely within the church or synagogue that one comes to one's religious beliefs--but to many Americans, it is the Gallup finding that is normal."

We see in Bellah's summation what some have described as one of the most prominent legacies of modernity--a legacy that has more or less been disdainful of all social parenting through institutions of any kind, religious institutions being no exception. Influenced by the modern notion of individualism, a person's faith as nurtured from childhood in a Christian home in cooperation with the faithful ministry of a local church is suspiciously less authentic than the testimonials that are so often celebrated at a Christian conference. But how does this compare to the biblical pattern

of passing down the faith from generation to generation--a pattern that was celebrated by Paul with respect to Timothy? (2 Tim. 1:5). Even tradition itself in the nurture of faith is discounted under the individualized tendencies of our modern times. But again, how does this square with the expectation of scripture? (1 Cor. 11:2, 2 Thess. 2:15).

This personal conversion scenario diminishes the church as an essential element of the gospel by means of a sovereign audience sociology. Here, the spiritual has been domesticated under individualism and the work of the church is now viewed as secondary at best to the work of private individuals. The spiritual keys, if managed by a church, are viewed with suspicion in preference for the spiritual keys that reside in every human heart. That kind of "parenting" associated with an authorized ministry of word and oversight is negated not only as non-essential but even as suspicious. Certainly there is a great need to revisit the idea of a succession of an authorized ministry in the church today.

Our biblical survey could begin with those scriptures that would at least imply the need for authorization by those already authorized in order to maintain a qualified ministry. I take this first line of reasoning to be a kind of common sense approach, to be followed with more explicit teachings concerning the ordination (formal authorization) of the gospel ministry. So for instance, consider the following teachings in scripture and ask yourself what basic common sense we would know by inference.

1. Christ warns against assuming the position of a teacher without due caution,
James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.
2. Christ tells us to watch carefully lest false teachers bring harm to the church,
2 Pet. 2:1-2 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of these teachers the way of truth will be maligned.
2 John 1:10 Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching;
3. Christ commands that those who do teach false doctrine be removed from teaching,
Titus 1:11 they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gain what it is not right to teach.
4. Christ warns us that the last days will be characterized not only by "false teaching" but also a natural affinity for it so as to take all possible precautions against it,
2 Tim. 4:3 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires,
1 Tim. 4:1 now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,
5. Christ warns us that many will want to be teachers who may not be qualified,

- 1 Tim. 1:7 desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.
6. Christ explicitly commands that those who do teach be teachers of "sound doctrine,"
Titus 2:1 But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine.
 7. Christ commands that teachers are to be measured by the "standards" of sound doctrine,
2 Tim. 1:13 Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus,
 8. Christ intends for the ministry of "teaching" to be passed on through the succession of apostolic faith,
2 Tim. 2:2 and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.
 9. Christ commands the elders to "watch over the flock of God" with due diligence, and this would include keeping watch over the teaching of the church,
Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.
Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing--for that would be harmful to you.
 10. Christ warns that there will be self-appointed teachers who will mislead members of the church.
Jude 4 For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who long ago were designated for this condemnation as ungodly, who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

If these scriptures were all we had, it would be reason enough to have some means of authorizing those who should be teachers in the church. In other words, even from a practical perspective, who better to exercise oversight to satisfy the Great Commission than those uniquely equipped with the qualifications instituted by God as determined by those already qualified in the context of the household of God? This is the Protestant idea of "apostolic succession." Not a succession of human personalities as the Roman Catholic church believes, but the succession of authorized officers to rule well those counted as the flock of God. For the Reformers, the only thing worse than the Roman idea of apostolic succession were the fanatics who had taken the opposite stance: to annul apostolic succession in the church altogether. In his commentary on Ephesians 4, John Calvin once said, "They therefore are insane who neglecting this means hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with fanatics, who pretend to secret revelations of the Spirit; and the proud who content themselves with the private reading of the Scripture, and imagine they do not need the ministry of the church."

We would devise, if but only for common sense, some means of accrediting those who would teach our children and our children's children. And if we were to set out to do this, we would most likely devise a system where certain standards would be measured against the beliefs and practices of those seeking to teach and lead. And we

would determine that those who rule and those who would be ruled should together make judgments as to the qualifications of a particular person. This is exactly the system that we follow in the Presbyterian church--a system that requires both the confidence of ministerial peers and those who will be ministered unto--before a person can be ordained. But do we see ordination in scripture? Our answer is a clear yes!

We will notice first of all how the term "appoint" is applied to the offices of ministry in the pastoral epistles (Titus 1:5). This is significant since the pastoral epistles were written as instructions for the church as it was to continue on after the apostolic era. The appointment of officers (however one may name them) in the church is accompanied by the "laying on of hands" first by the apostles (Acts 8:18) and later by the "presbytery" (1 Tim. 4:14, KJV), indicating an authorization that is ultimately traced back to Christ insofar as he authorized the apostles to do this (Mt. 16:18, Eph. 2:20). Therefore, while we do not hold to a human succession traced through human lineage as the Roman church does, we do recognize a lineage that has been handed down through presbyteries, or that corporate body called the church in 1 Tim. 3:15, which is the guardian of the truth.

In 1 Peter 5:1-4, Peter's exhortation is for his "fellow elders" to "shepherd the flock of God. What made these elders "fellows?" Elsewhere in scripture, the "elder" is a term used to describe an office of the church (1 Tim. 3) together with the qualifications attached to it. Even as the verb form of "to shepherd" is used by Peter, the noun form of the same verb is also applied to the office of "bishop/pastor." The office of "bishop/pastor/elder" is clearly meant to be patterned after the shepherdship of Christ, as explicitly noted in 1 Peter 5. Notice therefore that Christ is the ultimate good shepherd.

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

Christ commands the apostles to shepherd, and especially Peter as the leader of the apostles:

John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

Peter therefore commands his fellow elders to shepherd the flock of God as accountable to and patterned after the ultimate chief shepherd, Jesus Christ. And whatever else shepherding involves, it included "exercising oversight," according to

Peter. Who was Peter exhorting except those set apart in the church for the purpose of shepherding? Now notice Acts 20. It is particularly interesting to see all this language in what was clearly an early ordination service.

Acts 20:28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Earlier, in vs. 17, these "overseers" (the word used in 1 Peter in the verb form) are also called "presbuteros" as in the 1 Peter passage. And here, the same exact command "to shepherd" with almost identical cautions is related to the persons being exhorted. And throughout the Acts 20 passage, language depicting ordination is discovered and would have been assumed as well by Peter. So for instance, Acts 20:28 states,

Pay attention (imper.) to yourself and to all the sheep in which the Holy Spirit has *appointed* you an overseer (episcopos) to shepherd the church of God, which he ordained (derived from "appoint") by his own blood.

This language of "appoint" is used here and elsewhere to describe the divine placement of a person to some role or office through God's sovereign ordination. For instance:

1 Cor. 12:28 And God has **appointed** these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

2 Cor. 5:19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has **appointed** to us the word of reconciliation.

1 Tim. 1:12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, **putting** (appointing) me into the ministry,

1 Tim. 2:7 for which I was **appointed** a preacher and an apostle--I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying--a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

2 Tim. 1:11 to which I was **appointed** a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

In Acts 20, the "appointment" is to the office of "episcopos," which is sometimes translated "overseer" or "pastor," whose calling is *to shepherd the church of God*. So also, the office of shepherd is listed alongside of teachers, most likely one and the same office.

Eph. 4:11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some **pastors** and teachers,

Yet another indication of ordination is found in Acts 20:31-32 and the language of

commit.

vs. 31-32, Therefore, keep alert and remember that for three years, night and day, I did not cease with tears warning every single one. And now I *commit you over* to God and to the word of his grace, to that which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among the saints.

This language of *commit* is the same word as "commission" used here and elsewhere to describe the authorized commissioning of a man to the ministry of the word, i.e. a passing down to others the office of ministry by those already "committed."

Acts 14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they **commended** them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

1 Tim. 1:18 This charge I **commit to you**, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare,

2 Tim. 2:2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, **commit** these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Therefore, in each of these passages, those being committed to the pastoral ministry of the word were not self-committed but rather committed by someone who had already been committed. This whole process we have seen was ultimately started by Christ through the commission given to Peter to "build his church" and then to "shepherd the sheep"--this was a commission that was then passed down through the apostles as in the case of Paul to Timothy, etc. Moreover, we know that this passing down to others a ministry in succession to the apostles was ceremonially depicted by the laying on of hands.

1 Tim. 4:14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

2 Tim. 1:6 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

By the laying on of hands, no clearer sign could be had that the ministry of the word was not something a person commits to himself, but is committed to him by the church in the principle of succession to the apostles. Their authority was not that of an apostle to build the church in its foundational aspects of revelation. Rather their authority was like Timothy, as one qualified to pass down the faith to others once passed down to him by the apostles. Whereas all Christians may encourage and instruct one another in an authorized manner—in fact this is even encouraged by God (Heb. 10:24)--all Christians are not called to teach and preach as with authority committed to him/her by God through the church. When a person is effectually called

into the church of Jesus Christ, he is not given to an individual to be discipled as is such common practice today. Rather he is called into the church to be a disciple. Apart from ordination, there is no church acting corporately through its officers. We are left only with a self-appointed or irregularly appointed person entrusted with the task that was once given to the church to make disciples (Mt. 28). And is it merely about a power move on our part? Hardly! It is about Paul's command to Timothy to "guard the gospel" as this was deposited not to any one individual but to the church of the living God, "the pillar and bulwark of the truth." This distinction between lay exhortation and the authorized ministry of the word was well articulated by Jonathan Edwards as far back as the seventeenth century.

Teaching is spoken of in Scripture as an act of authority (1 Tim. 2:12). In order to a man's preaching, special authority must be committed to him, (Rom. 10:15) "How shall they preach except they be sent?" No man but a minister duly appointed to that sacred calling ought to follow teaching and exhorting as a calling, or so as to neglect that which is proper calling. Having an office of a teacher in the church of God implies two things: 1. As being invested with the authority of a teacher; and 2. As being called to the business of a teacher to make it the business of his life. Therefore, that man who is not a minister, taking either of these upon him, invades the office of a minister. It will be a very dangerous thing for lay-men, in either of these respects to invade the office of a minister. If this be common among us, we shall be in danger of having a stop put to the work of God...

We have then in Acts 20 an ancient ordination whereby those called to the office of overseer-pastor were to succeed the apostles in order to shepherd God's flock who were purchased by the blood of Christ. Returning then to 1 Peter 5, the language of jurisdiction is clearly expressed. For instance, he refers to the "elders with respect to you." For those who would deny church membership and accountability to some authorized shepherds, this phrase would be hard to account for. Peter then makes it all the more clear as he explicitly refers to that flock "committed to their charge," again the language of jurisdiction. The language literally reads, "with respect to the number." Peter has in mind some definable and discernible "number" that a shepherd has been authorized to shepherd. And of course, all this New Covenant teaching enjoys the precedence of the Old Covenant church as well. There was in fact never a time when God didn't ordain leaders to watch over the people of God, albeit under different forms of government throughout the ages.

Num. 27:17 "who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

2Sam. 5:2 "Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the Lord said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.'"

2 Sam. 7:7 "Wherever I have moved about with all the children of Israel, have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"

1 Kings 22:17 Then he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.'"

1 Chr. 11:2 "Also, in time past, even when Saul was king, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the Lord your God said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over My people Israel.'"

1 Chr. 17:6 "Wherever I have moved about with all Israel, have I ever spoken a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"

2 Chr. 18:16 Then he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.'"

Ps. 23:1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

So now the question is , who are the "fellow elders" today? Our answer is, those authorized by a true church of Christ as defined by the three apostolic marks and as set apart by the laying on of hands in the corporate assembly. And we should make no mistake here. The call to the ministry is a call to shepherd. This will requires an intimate and careful involvement in the life of the people--a work intensive kind of approach to ministry. This speaks, it would seem, to the return to a parish model of church growth as wonderfully summarized by Richard Baxter's *Reformed Pastor*. And since Baxter's book is still in print, I will not here repeat what he says. I will simply note again that his demographic realities led to his way of visitation and pastoral care--so then should ours. Perhaps new structures will need to be envisioned in order that the pastor and elders will have opportunities for shepherding. But as for their duties, they will include teaching, watching, warning, loving, correcting, rebuking, visiting, preaching, serving, etc. In summary, John Owens once wrote about the pastoral office:

A man is a pastor unto them whom he feeds by pastoral teaching, and to no more; and he that doth not so feed is no pastor. Nor is it required only that he preach now and then at his leisure, but that he lay aside all other employments, though lawful, all other duties in the church, as unto such a constant attendance on them as would divert him from this work, that he give himself unto it, that he be in these things laboring to the utmost of his ability. Without this no man will be able to give a comfortable account of the pastoral office at the last day.

As we think more about the vision for pastoral ministry, so many things should be said that will not be said here. We should for instance talk about the need to be sound in doctrine and lifestyle. I take this to be Paul's point to Timothy, "take heed to yourself and to your doctrine, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1Tim.4:16). We should discuss the whole issue of regular pastoral visitation and the parish as opposed to the mega-church model of ministry. Whereas many good things are being done in very large churches, it would seem to me that the sheep ought to have regular access to those who are authorized and trained in the ministry of the word. But I will leave this for another day as well. Rather for the present purpose, we will look at preaching" where perhaps more than any single issue we are in need of biblical thinking.

Some Thoughts on Preaching

Whereas this section is obviously applicable to the preacher, it is also indirectly applicable to the worshipper. As listeners, we bring expectations to the sermon. Should the sermon be entertaining necessarily? Is it to be one or another style or take one or another form? The way a listener resolves these issues will impact the kind of church he/she will go to, and will in many ways tempt the preacher one way or another in fear of no one listening. Clearly there is a need to teach on the element of preaching. The following is an outline of some of the kinds of things that need to be said. Again, I can present nothing close to an exhaustive discussion here.

1. What is preaching?

- a. Neh. 8:1-8--at the very least, it is reading the sacred text and giving a sense as to what it means in the popular language.
- b. Titus 2:11-15--its aim is most fundamentally to reconcile people to God by proclaiming the grace of God in Christ, both now and in the age to come.

2. Where is the "word?"

- a. 1 Tim. 3:16--If it is the "words" themselves of Holy Scripture that are inspired, and not the author or reader as held by liberalism and the new hermeneutic respectively, then we would want to study the scriptures in its original languages, and we would want to study it with a grammatical-literary analysis. Moreover, the content of our sermons would need to be driven by the words of scripture more than the words of the local newspaper or publishing house. People have come to hear a word from God, not our words or the words of this or that religious

pundit.

b. Heb. 1:1-4--And because our scripture consists of many parts organically united to the whole of redemptive history, we would want to study the scripture in its redemptive-historical dynamic. We rightly distinguish between the particularities associated with one or another author or book, but we would do this and then also recognize its theological unity and compatibility with the rest of scripture.

3. There is great value in preaching expositional sermons through whole books of the Bible.

There is no more natural and sure way to preach the "*whole* counsel of God's word." It helps prevent against a single-issue church--either driven by the pastors pet projects or driven by the "power brokers" that inevitably rise up in a particular congregation.

There is a beautiful nuance concerning the revelation of God and/or salvation that would often be lost if not for expositional preaching through whole books of the bible. For example, some of my most effective sermons are ones I would have never preached if left to my own determination, which suggests that many of the greatest jewels are located in some of the most obscure or difficult passages.

It guards against a "gospel" that is polemically driven. Not only will many a preacher avoid spiritual burnout by expositional preaching, but so too will many congregations be spared of spiritual burnout. It is very easy to let a hot issue dominate our thoughts and ministry. But how refreshing then for both the preacher and the congregation to be forced to move on by an expositional method of preaching.

It teaches people how to read their own Bibles by way of example.

So many points are missed because a given text is decontextualized from its own narrative context. Certain themes and key words emerge that play very significantly into the way I understand and even preach a given passage--themes that can only be discerned when I have been reading and preaching the whole book.

The preacher's own biblical education is best served by expositional preaching. For what greater compliment could be given than that the preacher is wise in the Word of God.

On a more practical note, the preacher is spared the doubt of what to preach next.

A large portion of exegetical work is accomplished at the "front end" such that sermons through whole books get easier and easier as one progresses through the book. On the front end, for example, a "biblical theology" on a given book might require some work, but it pays off as the series progresses.

4. Our view of "progressive revelation" as affirming the unity of the whole Bible in one redemptive history leads me to a redemptive-historical approach to preaching that culminates with Christ.

a. Our goal, given our understanding of Scripture within a redemptive history, is for each sermon to be an Emmaus Road experience for the hearer (note below, this will not mean that we ignore a text's historical location at one level, but rather that we

will relate the first level meaning to the a second level meaning as revealed in Jesus Christ).

Luke 24:13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem... **15** While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ... **25** Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! **26** Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" **27** Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

5. This does not mean that the sermon is monolithic in style, however. There can be many variations of sermon organization depending on the specific genre being preached, yet they will all lead to Christ. On the one hand, we expect that God will speak to us in a variety of forms with respect to preaching. It could be said that to prefer story telling would be then to prefer only one genre of biblical text. While it is true I suspect that postmodern people tend toward "narrative--it isn't true that God reduces himself to this genre in speaking to us. We should expect that if God spoke to us in a multi-dimensional way in the scriptures, then the truth itself is multi-dimensional as well and will be better understood if the sermon will respect this. The typical sermon is not only driven by the text with respect to its meaning, but even its form in some respects. For example:

a. Old Covenant narrative--the sermon would ordinarily be more narrative in style and focus upon the story of God's intervention throughout redemptive history to preserve the covenant and build his Kingdom. The ultimate intervention is Christ and how God preserves His covenant by the work of Christ as received by faith alone... The style best suited to a narrative is in fact storytelling at the dual level of the immediate context and then in the greater redemptive context leading to Christ. The hearer will be directed less to his or her own moral responsibilities and/or duties and more to God's dealings in the past that we might trust his dealings in the future through Christ.

b. Wisdom literature (Proverbs)--the sermon would take on the form of a "law-grace" kind of organization. The Law as consisting of the wisdom of God would be preached such as to reveal our failure to keep the law--"Who among you is wise?" The hearer, once convinced of his/her failure to keep the law and the folly of his/her lack of wisdom--will then be led to Christ who became for us the "wisdom of God." This "law-grace" form would obviously apply to the law as well. By the end of the first part of the sermon, the hearer will be filled with the despair of sin in his lives--realizing by the gravity and depth of the law just how holy is God and how unholy we are. This then leads to the second part of the sermon which then expounds upon the greater depth and greater power of grace as accomplished by Christ and applied to us by the Holy Spirit in the gift of faith.

c. New Covenant Epistle--the genre is more didactic and will require a more didactic style of preaching. Moreover, the form will follow the epistles themselves

which tend toward a "doctrine-application" kind of structure. This was the style most prominent in Puritan preaching. It is important then to preach a given section of an epistle with the other section in view. So that if the sermon was on Rom. 12, the theology of salvation in Rom 3:18-11 would be kept in view so as to demonstrate that our living sacrificial lives is properly done not in order to be saved but in response to our salvation by Christ. Therefore, the sermon would be "saving grace doctrine--how then shall we live?" kind of style. The grace then is viewed not only as saving us from the penalty of our sin, but also the sins themselves and their subsequent miseries even in this life. ("For the grace of God has been revealed, teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires" Titus 2:11). And yet this "grace" is viewed as in the imitation of Christ and in the power that Christ supplies, never in order to be saved but as a consequence of being saved. The primary motivation then for morals is gratitude given the doctrine of grace that are before the morals.

My point is that while all texts are not preached in the same way, they all lead to Christ.

6. A biblical-theological approach to preaching will respect that all texts are covenantally conditioned. A covenant hermeneutic will show itself in relating a given passage to the relevant covenant conditions, promises, curses--both with respect to its immediate covenant context and secondly when not a New Covenant passage, as the meaning would translate into the New Covenant as accomplished by Christ. Thus, in the Old Testament, (and, I believe, in significant portions of the gospels where Christ ministers "under the law"), the need for a two-level analysis. The first is to understand a given text in its own redemptive context, and the second is to locate the point in the greater redemptive story that leads ultimately to Christ. (See E.P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*). One of the advantages to this is to help the preacher avoid moralizing certain passages through false analogies between a biblical narrative and contemporary life.

6. The vernacular sermon consists of more than merely speaking in the same language as the hearer. The preacher will want to consider the various demographic realities that might shape the form and circumstance of the preaching event. For example, how long, style (formal vs. informal), dress of preacher, the degree to which "demonstrations of logic" are necessary, tone (preachy vs. more conversational), etc. Not only will the preacher need to know the people, but study them and their "street language" ways of communicating. (Note, I think the issue of vernacular will also play out in the kind of worship style we have, the kind of music and accompaniment, etc. While I would not let demographics control the content of worship or the "elements" included in worship--say whether to serve Lord's supper or not--I would put a certain content into a medium that is more or less vernacular. Thus, I hold to a kind of principled vernacular worship service. I recognize that this opens up a whole other set of issues not directly relevant to these thoughts.) A vernacular sermon is no less a God-centered sermon. Nor is a vernacular sermon any less of the authoritative voice of God mediated through the preaching event. My point is that what is communicated will in fact be relative at some level to the people themselves. At the end of the day, it is my goal for all people to get

the sense of "thus saith the Lord"--albeit within their own demographic context.

7. The place of "person" in the preaching event: The character of the preacher IS relevant, although in a qualified sense.

On the one hand, the preacher should speak out of office, not out of person.

This means that I try to distance myself and my own struggles from what I can say in the pulpit. Many, many times, in fact just about all the time, I would not be able to preach if I thought that in some manner I lived up to the implications of the sermon.

However, the people ought to see sincerity in the preacher, especially in so far as he/she is reliant upon the grace of the gospel so as to offer no pretense of measuring up to the law, so to speak.

A preacher, in so far as he/she is an elder by way of the faith, ought to be exemplary (which is NOT to be confused with perfect). I do suspect there are certain sins that rightly are forgivable but are not forgettable in so far as the calling to the office of preacher is concerned. That is, some sins seriously harm the trust needed in the person filling the office.

While it is certainly my goal to be "one of them" during the course of the week, I am also mindful that I am not "one of them" as God's spokesmen on Sunday morning. This creates a kind of distance that is difficult personally, but I think positive.

Therefore, every preacher should consider being accountable to some other person outside the congregation with respect to his moral life. This should also be someone that can help you find perspective when you are discouraged, etc.

Again, it is my opinion, but I think too often preachers bring too many of their own problems and struggles to the pulpit because of their own insecurities. While I do think there is room for some degree of vulnerability in the pulpit, at least enough that the people see that you are being preached to along with everyone else, it becomes a sad situation if in fact the congregation finds itself without a "voice from God" because the human voice has become too prominent.

In short, people come less to hear the person preaching and more the voice of God, albeit mediated through the human incarnation of that voice in the human preacher. This is perhaps the greatest mystery in preaching.

8. A "Good" Sermon: I believe that good sermons will balance three things--which then will be reflected in what we read and study.

1. Text driven--such that we will want to be students of the Bible as by our doing--week in and week out--the necessary exegetical work. From exegesis, the sermon will derive its main point and perhaps also its "form"--e.g. rhetorical, narrative, law-grace, etc.

2. Confessional--A good sermon is not academic in the sense that we can personally detach ourselves from what we are preaching and hearing. Rather it is to feed our beliefs as they impact our lives. According to 1 Tim. 3:15, it is the church that is the "pillar and bulwark of the truth." Beliefs are best guarded by the church and not by a single individual, and the preacher should be humble to recognize this. This is why the preacher ought to be

fluent in his/her tradition and a student of theology in general. (I assume here a basic appreciation for confessionalism.)

3. Vernacular--I mean by this more than semantics. A good sermon is in the language and demographic ethos of the people. While the text drives the main point of a sermon and a confession locates the text within a theological orthodoxy, the unique demographic realities of the people themselves will drive some aspects of the form and/or circumstance of the sermon. The preacher then will want to be a student of sociology and especially "street stuff" not only that he/she might better understand the relevance of a given passage, but so as to better understand the best way to communicate it.

The Great Need For *Reformational* Preaching and Leadership Today

"Always reforming"--a common cliché within my own tradition. But what do we mean by this exactly? Perhaps we should begin with what we *don't* mean. It seems that the language of reformation" often implies polemics, narrow-mindedness or political "rightness" within ecclesiastical party-posturing. As I have toured the camps within my own denomination, I am often saddened that these things can obscure the true essence, or might I say "spirit" of reformation. The language of reformation is often confused with reading Calvin or Luther and repeating either their language or their strategies for today. Too often it seems, reformation means doing what they did *again*, perhaps even using the same mediums to communicate what is otherwise a similar message. Reformation, in short, is often confused with being old-fashioned or even traditional with perhaps the added ingredient of edginess.

I suppose it would surprise most that one of the more common accusations against Calvin in his day was that he was labeled a progressive. Calvin once complained, *I am aware of the odious names with which we are branded... we are accused of rash and impious innovation, for having ventured to propose any change at all on the former state of the church.* And yet, the spirit of reformation isn't a "new is better" strategy either. So what is the true *spirit of reformation today*?

It would seem that the spirit of reformation reveals itself in at least three dynamics. First, there is the dynamic of *confession*. By confession we mean the spirit that is always wanting to treat doctrine and theology as something to believe in, not merely something to talk about in an abstract way. Whereas there is a place for academic conversation about doctrine, we treat it in the church as something that will

translate into pastoral counseling, sermons and yes, innovative strategies for making our beliefs a reality in the world in which we live. This first dynamic will see everything we do as important relative to our beliefs. Just as in Calvin's day, reformation will involve such topics as worship, church leadership structures, evangelistic strategies, pastoral care, etc. *Confession* is both, and at the same time, principled and practical. *Confession* is concerned then not merely for ideas, but for a sociology of ideas as this involves the reformational concept of "church."

Second, the spirit of reformation is *constructive*. What is particularly important here is the activity of always going back to the Bible in order to construct our beliefs. Yes, we do this within a history of doing it. We do this humbly and always mindful that we are not the only people doing it--thus the need for historical interaction and inter-church, even inter-denominational, dialogue. But in the end, we talk about scripture, we reference scripture, we build upon the foundation that was laid not by Calvin or Luther or perhaps any one modern personality, but by the apostles as set apart by Christ (Eph. 2: 22-23). Sunday expositions are the focus of our theologizing. And we do this mostly to build something, not merely to tear something down. To read scripture only to condemn or critique without bringing positive solutions and models for ministry that will work is something other than the true spirit of reformation. And of course, this is the really hard part of reformation--solutions are much harder than criticism.

The third dynamic of the spirit of reformation is *progressive*. Yes, I said the "p" word as part of reformational language. The true spirit of reformation will translate theology into a particular vernacular. Ours is among other things a vernacular of the present looking to the future, not the past. The same apostolic ideas that we share with the seventeenth century reformers will be understood and received by people today within different forms and circumstances than by the people of Calvin's day. How do we translate the same old truths into present conditions? We will need always to evaluate the medium so as to discern the implied message--but we will need to do this with discernment about the times in which we live. So for instance, if we share with the reformers a commitment to the church as an essential element of the gospel, we should consider that Calvin's "Geneva model" for church planting might be non-reformational if applied today. But maybe not! Each case and circumstance needs to be evaluated on

its own terms relative to thinking *confessionally* and *constructively* about modern times.

These three dynamics are what we are all about. It means that we are always on a journey together. The reformational spirit is fluid, not static. We are always revisiting issues, always willing to change (in fact principled change is embraced). This takes the pressure off in one sense. For we don't judge one another or our church as if everything we do or think is absolute. What is absolute is the authority of scripture to direct our thinking and strategizing. And I should warn you, this *spirit of reformation* will often result in forming strange alliances. We will not fit the easy party categories. We will be nuanced in ways that make some people nervous--as if our nuance puts us on a slippery slope to somewhere unorthodox. We will be misunderstood at times as being some party that we are not. In fact, like the reformers of old, we will be accused by people on both ends of the spectrum of being in the opposing camp. And yet the true spirit of reformation seeks not to be a reactionary movement, but a planting and building movement, always talking as if the conversation matters. This *spirit of reformation* is what biblical leadership is all about.

Appendix A

A Historical Case Study Ffor the Church as an Essential Element of the Gospel

The church question is not new. I have already noted in the introduction how the issue was raised as early as Augustine in the fourth century. But for the present historical survey, we will begin in the year 1568, when a prominent physician at Heidelberg named Erastus wrote on the subject of the Church and set off a controversy that rages even to this day. The controversy concerned the role of the church as distinct from the state to declare who should and should not partake of the Lord's supper. In short, the Erastian theory denied the authority of Christ as mediated in a *visible church* by taking the powers of the keys from His office-bearers in the church and giving them to the civil magistrates. The two most famous documents that refuted the Erastian position were the 1578 Scottish *Second Book of Discipline* and the famous *One Hundred and Eleven Propositions* which was placed by George Gillespie before the Westminster General Assembly of 1647. According to Gillespie concerning the Westminster Assembly:

the great debate was over the proposition, Jesus Christ as King and Head of His church, hath appointed a government in the hands of church officers, distinct from

the civil government.

At the heart of the debate was whether or not the church-- by divine institution with a spiritual constitution, government and sacramental rituals--is essential to the gospel as distinct from the state. Stated differently, was the spiritual vocation of making disciples under the jurisdiction of the officers of a civil state or under the jurisdiction of officers in that kingdom society "not of this world?" Concerning the positive institution of the church by Christ in its spiritual mission, the *Second Book of Discipline* stated that
the power ecclesiastical is an authoritie granted by God the Father, through the Mediator Jesus Christ, unto his Kirk gathered, and having the ground in the word of God; to be put in execution by them, unto whom the spiritual government of the Kirk be lawful."

Again, in similar phraseology, the *One Hundred and Eleven Propositions* of 1647 affirmed that

The political or civil power is grounded upon the law of nature itself, and for that cause it is common to infidels with Christians; the power ecclesiastical dependth immediatly upon the positive law of Christ alone; that belongeth to the universal dominion of God the Creator over all nations; but this unto the special and economical kingdom of Christ the Mediator, which he exerciseth in the church alone, and which is not of this world.

Westminster solidly rejected Erastianism as unorthodox, affirming that "Jesus Christ as King and Head of His church, hath appointed a government in the hands of church officers, distinct from the civil government" and adding "out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. At the apex of the doctrine, the *Scottish doctrine* taught that the Church was ordained by Christ himself rather and did not originate from human innovation or practical expedience. Christ then, and Christ only, was understood to be the "King and Head of His Church." By its very nature, the church was considered to be divinely appointed as a complete organization of itself, with its own constitution, laws and revenues. As such, the church was every bit as much a "kingdom" as was a civil monarchy. Accordingly, the two powers, civil and spiritual, were said to differ in four fundamental ways.

The first manner of difference between the civil and spiritual powers pertained to their "efficient cause" or "author." The civil power was from "God the author of creation" and belonging "alike to all mankind whether heathen or Christian;" while the ecclesiastical power was "peculiarly from Jesus Christ the mediator and belongs only to

the church." Second, regarding their "material cause," or their corresponding power in the world, the civil power consisted of "being a power of the sword," whereas the ecclesiastical power consisted only of the "power of the keys to be exercised in the revealing of the word, dispensing the sacraments, executing the censures of the church in admonition, excommunication, etc." Third, as to their "formal cause," the "magistrates' power" was "according to the laws of man;" while ecclesiastical power "takes cognizance of, and passes judgment upon crimes according to the word of God." The church as such was understood to be the guardian only of special revelation, and special revelation was implicitly and thoroughly redemptive in its scope. Her charter then was not to interpret the common revelation of providence, but only the special revelation which climaxed in the Messiah. Fourth therefore, as to their "final cause" or end, the civil power's aim was to promote the "temporal, external, political good of human society; while the ecclesiastical power aims properly at the spiritual good and edification of the church." As summarized later by nineteenth-century pastor Stuart Robinson, "Christ's kingdom is bound first of all and last of all to have an eye to her Master's great purpose of salvation, and know nothing save Christ and Him crucified." Whereas the state is the institution established by God the creator, the church is the institution established by God the Redeemer. As such, the church is the mediatorial body of Christ!

The Scottish idea played a significant role in early colonial America so as to give birth to the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The Virginia fathers would argue for religious freedom by the "Scotch Fathers before them." The most significant precedent regarded overtures out of the Hanover Presbytery advocating church independence from the state in pre-revolutionary America. Accordingly among the numerous memorials to the legislature of Virginia during that great struggle the most remarkable is the series from the Hanover Presbytery composed of such men as James Waddell, William Graham and Stanhope Smith. While clearly the struggle for religious freedom had begun earlier during the colonial period by Presbyterian Francis Makemie, the series of memorials to the legislature of Virginia by the Hanover Presbytery began in 1776.

The first memorial of 1776 sought to restrict the "objects" of the "civil

government" to "the happiness and protection of man in his present state and existence: the security of the life, liberty and property of the citizens." The Second Memorial of April 25, 1785 argued "against a general assessment for the support of religion" by the state. Using terms familiar to the Scottish doctrine, Hanover argued that "Christ has ordained a complete system of laws for the government of his kingdom" such that "by His providence He will support it to its final consummation." Therefore, "in the fixed belief that the kingdom of Christ and the concerns of religion are beyond the limits of civil control, we should act an inconsistent and dishonest part were we to receive any emoluments from human establishments for support of the Gospel." The third memorial of October, 1788 argued against "the proposal to incorporate the Clergy of the Episcopal Church in Virginia." The fourth significant memorial was also against the incorporation act which was said by the memorial to "authorize and direct the regulation of spiritual concerns." These memorials eventually led to Virginia's celebrated act to establish religious freedom in 1785 and Thomas Jefferson's influence on the U.S. Constitution in its first amendment.

This brief history of the Scottish and American struggle for religious freedom more than illustrates the significance of the church question for today. We see already that to deny the church as an essential element of the gospel is to de facto recognize the state as having jurisdiction over the gospel. And history tells the story of a gospel that is domesticated by the culture wars of the civil sphere when the church loses its divine institution and distinct jurisdiction over the spiritual sphere. And yet the Erastian idea did not die in colonial America. For if the Scottish reformation "battled for the crown rights of the Lord Christ against the civil power claiming to control the Church," the nineteenth-century American context represented a battle for the crown rights of the Lord Christ against the sovereign audience." It is a battle that rages all the more today. In a telling description concerning the modern American context, Stuart Robinson argued that,

The principle is precisely the same, whether it be the mob and public opinion or the government that sets up the claim... the great principle for which they contended is still the same and the principle and spirit of Erastianism is still the same. The whole controversy resolves itself back into the simple question, Has Christ erected a spiritual government distinct

from the civil?

For Stuart Robinson in nineteenth-century America, the threat of state sovereignty in the Scottish context had been supplanted by the subtle egalitarian threat of popular sovereignty in the American context--a thesis that Nathan Hatch has convincingly argued in *The Democratization of American Christianity* today. If Nathan Hatch has it right, the new magistrate within a civil democracy has been redefined from a monarchy to a "sovereign audience." And whereas the magistrate has in fact changed, the issues are pretty much the same. It again comes down to whether or not we believe that God has established a visible church or not! In the words of Stuart Robinson, can a theology without a church any more than a church without a theology fulfill all the conditions of a pure gospel? Was Jesus Christ merely a teacher, or also a legislator and the founder not only of a school but also a commonwealth?

The two most prominent questions relating to the church in the 1850's pertained to the general topics of church polity and mission. The question regarding church polity dealt primarily with the nature and office of the eldership. Yet, most attention was given to what the *Presbyterial Critic* called "The Church Question." The controversy pertained to the existence of independent church boards as agents of the church, yet not accountable to the church courts directly, for accomplishing the gospel mandate to "make disciples." In the controversy surrounding the church question, the editors of the *Critic* (Thomas Peck and Stuart Robinson) unmistakably aligned themselves with the positions championed by James Henley Thornwell in the *Southern Presbyterian Review*. In an article entitled "Suggestions Touching the Presbyterian System for Spreading the Gospel," some of the "great aspects of the Presbyterian premise" were clearly expounded upon by the *Critic* in relation to this controversy:

First. The Church of Christ is a missionary association by the very law of its existence....To suppose any necessity for another, and a distinct association or organization of men for these purposes is to suppose an absurdity....The creation of the original organization for its own ends is sufficient. To demand another to carry out its purposes, is absurd. Hence, the Church alone, is the great authorized source for the extension of the means of grace, and the knowledge of salvation.

Second. We remark that the Church has been furnished with all the means, agents and powers, necessary to the accomplishment of her ends, and that

these are the best adapted of all conceivable methods for this purpose. The Church is an organized and finished kingdom. To deny it is to impeach the wisdom of her Head: it is to declare him guilty of the folly of organizing an institution for the attainment of an end, and yet leaving it unequipped with the officers necessary to attain it...that the order which God had imposed, in the organization of His visible Church, was far the best for the attainment of its ends. The very foolishness of God, is wiser than men, in this as in other things.

Third. The order of the Church is not only adapted to its ends: but it is paramount.

Therefore, according to the *Critic*, “The Radical Difference: In the Last Analysis of the Church Question” was between those who “exalt the logical element in Religion, to an equality with—or even a supremacy over, the supernatural element,” as compared to those who do “away then with all human trust, all human contrivances. With a doctrine taught of God, an order revealed by him, an efficiency communicated from him, a mission entrusted to us of him; all carnal devices of whatever kind are at once a hindrance to us, and an insult to the Majesty of Heaven. God has laid for himself the model of his kingdom.” In yet another article published in the *Presbyterial Critic*, a good summary of the arguments against church boards was furnished:

1. All Ecclesiastical Boards, strictly speaking are based upon the principle of Independency—they have no permanent internal bond of concert and union, with each other.
2. In a system like Presbyterianism, such Boards, are like two powers, inconsistent with each other, placed in the same machine....Their principles, and the principles of the Church, never can be in active exercise at the same time—without conflict.
3. The best and most natural defense of ecclesiastical boards (as opposed to independent boards) as connected with our church courts, is that they are strictly speaking, commissions of the church courts, say of the GA [General Assembly]. A commission is different from a committee, mainly in this, that the latter examines and reports, the former examines and concludes.
4. And we desire that if church action shall be substituted for Board action; that it shall be substituted directly, in every case, where it may be conveniently, wisely, and profitably so substituted; and that it shall be substituted indirectly as a church action through Boards, instead of a Board action through and upon the Church, if the name, Board, must be retained.

The *Critic* then summarized its position in the following way:

Why should we mar, by our foolish additions, the workmanship of infinite wisdom? He has committed to his church, as his church, the means of saving the world: why should she with an imbecility at once faithless and presumptuous, confessing herself an all-sufficient counselor, turn over to others, no matter to whom, her own appropriate, nay her express work? The germ of all apostasy is concealed in the defection. For if the objects set before God's people are not addressed to their faith, they come with no obligation to his church: but if they do address themselves to our faith, they specifically appertain to the kingdom of Messiah. In the one case we divest the sacred investiture of Christ; in the other we substitute as his, the commandments of men. In either case a principle is enthroned in the bosom of the church, which is sufficient if fully acted out, to remove every land-mark established by God, and to bring in every invention ever devised by man. It is a defection whose principle covers the totality of revealed religion. For the instant we settle it, as the mind of God, that the office of his church is not to do his work, but to see it done; then the whole position of the church as well towards God and his people as toward this guilty world, is utterly changed from the ground on which the Apostles, the Confessors, and the Reformers have all placed it. But until this be done, there is an end of all reason by which to justify the least departure from the simplicity of Faith.

The debate resulted in not only a reaffirmation of *Jure Divino* ecclesiology, but it also raised the question about the mission of the church in its relation to the civil sphere of society. According to the *Critic*, "One of the difficulties in the present controversy was that the church, state, and society had become mingled." In essence, the "church question" was increasingly over the uniqueness of the church's mission as a "spiritual institution." In an article entitled, "The Gospel Idea of Preaching," the *Critic* clearly distinguished between the offices of the church and its corresponding spiritual responsibilities, and the offices of the state and its corresponding civil responsibilities: "[Insomuch as] the preacher's business is the redemption of the soul, and his instrument is Bible truth, it is plain that he has no business in the pulpit, with Nebraska bills, Abolitionism, politics, Eastern questions, and all the farrago of subjects. The preacher's business in the pulpit is to make Christians; and not to make free-soilers, Maine-law men, statesmen, historians, or social philosophers." The question was then supposed by the *Critic*, "Are Bible principles never to be applied, then, to the correction of the social evils of the day, by those who are the appointed expounders of the Bible?" Its response: "So far as God so applies them in the Bible, yes; but no farther."

The purely "spiritual" mission of the church was described by James Thornwell in

the following terms:

What then, is the Church? It is not, as we fear too many are disposed to regard it, a moral institute of universal good, whose business it is to wage war upon every form of human ill, whether social, civil, political or moral....She must leave them to the Providence of God, and to human wisdom sanctified and guided by the spiritual influences which it is her glory to foster and cherish....It has a fixed and unalterable Constitution; and that Constitution is the Word of God. It is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ....The power of the Church, accordingly, is only ministerial and declarative....Beyond the Bible she can never go, and apart from the Bible she can never speak.

The result of the 1850's controversy regarding the "church question" for the Southern Presbyterian Church was to affirm the church as a *sufficient* and an *essential* element of the gospel whose mission was *exclusively* spiritual in the making of disciples. Some notable quotes from church history are as follows:

Affirmation Throughout Church History:

- ***Westminster Confession of Faith***—The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, *out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.*
- ***Thirty-nine Articles: Article XIX, of the Church***—The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that *of necessity are requisite to the same.* As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred: so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith.
- ***Article XXIII***—It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard.
- ***The 1689 London Baptist Confession, "The Church"*** (#7 and #12):

To each of these churches thus gathered, according to his mind declared in his word, he hath given all that power and authority, which is in any way needful for

their carrying on that order in worship and discipline, which he hath instituted for them to observe; with commands and rules for the due and right exerting, and executing of that power (Mt. 18:17, 18; 1 Cor. 5:4, 5, 5:13, 2 Cor. 2:6–8).

As all believers are bound to join themselves to particular churches, when and where they have opportunity so to do; so all that are admitted unto the privileges of a church, are also under the censures and government thereof, according to the rule of Christ (1 Thess. 5:1).

- **St. Augustine, *Confessions***—“Victorinus, said to Simplicianus, not openly, but secretly, and as a friend, ‘Know thou that I am a Christian,’ To which he replied, ‘I will not believe it, nor will I rank you among the Christians unless I see you in the Church of Christ’” (VIII.ii.4).
- **John Calvin, *“Ephesians”***—“They therefore are insane who, neglecting this means, hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with fanatics, who pretend to secret revelations of the Spirit; and the proud who content themselves with the private reading of the Scripture, and imagine they do not need the ministry of the church.”
- **George Gillespie, *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming***—“This truth, that Jesus Christ is a king, and hath a kingdom and government in his church distinct from the kingdoms of this world, and from the civil government, hath this commendation and character above all other truths, that Christ himself suffered to the death for it, and sealed it with his blood....This kingly office of Jesus Christ (as well as his prophetic and priestly) is administered and exercised, not only inwardly and invisibly, by the working of the Spirit in the souls of particular persons, but outwardly also, and visibly in the church, as a visible, political, ministerial body, in which he hath appointed his own proper officers, ambassadors, courts, laws, ordinances, censures, and all these administrations, to be in his own name, as the only King and Head of the church.”
- **John Owen, *“The Gospel Church-State to be Continued”*** (Vol. 15, p. 331, *Works*) — “And those who plead for the continuation of a successive ministry without respect unto these things (biblically authorized government and sacraments), without resolving both the authority and office of it into them, do but erect a dead image, or embrace a dead carcass, instead of the living and life-giving institutions of Christ. They take away the living creature, and set up a skin stuffed with straw.”
- **Charles Hodge, *“Ephesians”***—“It is by the church redeemed by the blood of Christ, and sanctified by his Spirit, that to all orders of intelligent beings is to be made known the all coming ages, the brightest display of the divine perfections....This gives us our highest conception of the dignity of the church....If then it is through the Church that God designs specially to manifest to the highest order of intelligence his infinite power, grace and Christ's Lordship. We affirm that certain aspects of ministry are by virtue of an influence

wisdom, the church in her consummation must be the most glorious of his works.”

- **Stuart Robinson (Oct. 29, 1863)** — “Neither a theology without a Church, any more than a Church without a theology, fulfills all the conditions of a pure gospel? Jesus Christ was not merely a teacher, as Socrates, but a legislator, as Solon, and the founder of a commonwealth.”

Appendix B

Questions Concerning The Para-church

Once it is discovered that we actually believe in the church as an essential element of the gospel, one of the questions that commonly arises pertains to the issue of the para-church. Especially, how should the para-church relate to the church and vice versa? Our response will need to be nuanced and gracious. First let us lay out two principles from which to discuss the whole issue. We will then offer words of application.

Two biblical principles:

1. Christ has established the visible church as His vehicle of salvation and His school of discipleship unto the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Mt. 28:19–20 .

The Great Commission presupposes a visible church that embodies the tripartite offices of Christ (prophet, priest, and king) in her apostolic doctrine, worship, and government. With Christ as her chief cornerstone and only head, the church is called to serve as the household of the living God and the pillar and bulwark of the truth (Mt. 16:18, Eph. 2:20; 1 Tim. 3:15). Though we recognize and lament the failures of the church in her calling throughout history, we are resolved to be always reforming and ever more zealous in obeying our commission.

Consequently, we believe that discipleship will necessarily involve the following four kinds of ministry as these ought to be coordinated and integrated together in the life of an individual in so far as he/she is "under one Lord, one baptism, one faith." Countless tensions would be resolved in both the para-church workers and those they serve if these four dynamics could be coordinated together in order then to

complement one another. The four dynamics are as follows:

1. *Missions Dynamic*--Evangelism and church planting as related to the following three marks of the church (Col. 4:3, etc).
2. *Confessional Dynamic*--The teaching and training in righteousness according to apostolic teaching (Eph.4, 2 Tim. 1:13, 2 Thess. 2:15).
3. *Sacramental Dynamic*--Worship in the mediated presence of Christ in the present age (Heb. 10:19-24, ff).
4. *Government Dynamic*--Oversight, model, accountability, discipline (1 Peter 5, Heb. 13:7, 17, etc).

Our point then is that by definition, the missions dynamic will require that the other three dynamics be kept together in an integrated way, lest our discipleship be severely flawed. We in short believe that the sacramental aspect of a person's life ought to be related to the governmental dynamic and the teaching dynamic. So for instance, the shepherd ought to be under submission to the same confessional standard as is being applied when determining a person's relationship to Christ at His sacramental table, etc. To do otherwise puts disciples in some very odd predicaments.

2. God uses his people in manifold ways to complement the work of the church in accomplishing this commission. We therefore recognize the possible role and prudential value of various para-church organizations insofar as they complement, and not compete with, the church.

Whereas the church is a Kingdom society and the Kingdom of God includes the church (Mt. 16:19, 21:43, Mk. 10:14, Col. 4:11 and perhaps also John 18:36), the two are not synonymous in that God's Kingdom may also be described as the expansion of His Lordship into the lives of people such that its sphere exceeds the sphere of the local church (Mt. 6:33, 10:14; 1 Cor. 4:20; Acts 28:31, etc.).

Therefore, one could say that church planting is the expansion of the Kingdom of God, but one could also speak of the influence of individuals for the Lordship of Christ in the lives of people as the expansion of the Kingdom of God. We affirm that as individuals are filled by the Holy Spirit, and so speak the truth of Christ in accordance with Scripture, these individuals are agents used by God to expand His Kingdom.

“The Kingdom of God” then means the actual exercise of the divine supremacy in the interest of the divine glory (Mt. 6:10, 33; Mk. 12:34; 1 Cor. 15:28)” (Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*).

Our Lord looked upon the visible church as a veritable embodiment of his kingdom....We must say, therefore, that the kingdom forces which are at work, the kingdom life which exists in the invisible sphere, find expression in the kingdom-organism of the visible church. That Christ the King in this church and all authority exercised within any church-body derives from him is an important principle of church government, which those who endeavor to distinguish between the kingdom of God and the visible church do not always sufficiently keep in mind,” (Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*).

Application:

1. We need to distinguish between those Christian organizations that complement the church in its work and those Christian organization that in effect compete and take valuable resources away from the church to do its work.

When people speak of the para-church today, they often include two types of organizations. First, there is the organization that performs a service that is then used by the church to do its thing. For example, a publishing house that publishes church hymnals is a para-church organization. Perhaps even a seminary is a para-church organization. Second, there is the volunteer organization that is motivated out of Christian sympathies to do something relative to the common good. Some examples would be perhaps a Christian school, or a Christian lobby group, or a Christian organization aimed at family issues. Those in the latter category might even be "ministries" (broadly speaking) aimed at thinking and acting more Christianly toward one or another vocation or common grace calling. Another example would be a Christian legal society that limits its activity to those issues relevant to thinking and acting Christianly as it relates to the legal profession.

In other words, neither of these groups takes as its mission :to make disciples"

relative to preaching the gospel and bringing them into the mediated presence of Christ as by an authorized ministry of the word, sacraments and pastoral care. Neither of these groups would attempt to provide structures and/or contexts whereby a person is being disciplined. All of these groups would direct a person to the church for pastoral oversight and care. In short, each of these groups would respect what Edwards has noted concerning the distinction between lay exhortation and an authorized ministry of the Word and Sacrament in the Church (see chapter 6).

2. We should humbly expose as unbiblical those organizations without the integrated three marks of the church who take it upon themselves to make disciples. *Yet we should do this in a carefully nuanced and gracious manner.*

Some of the people who are most sincere and sacrificial for the gospel of Jesus Christ are working within the para-church context. Moreover, even if we will want to see discipleship within the jurisdiction of the church, this will not negate the many good things that God is doing through leaders in the para-church, albeit in spite of what we believe to be an unbiblical context from which to do it. That is, we may condemn the social structure of this kind of para-church ministry, but we do not condemn the people per se. Many of the people who minister in the para-church would readily be qualified ministers of the gospel in the church context. Moreover, many of these people do a better job of preaching and exercising oversight in a loving and pastoral way than those leaders in any given church. We should therefore affirm our co-laborers in so far as they do good things--things even that the church is supposed to be doing.

All of this conversation then should be put into the context of the reformational spirit. And we should assume while continuing to talk that we all want what is best for the gospel. Both sides should be willing to examine carefully the biblical teachings. At least partially speaking, this has been the aim of this book. It is true that to talk will be to entertain thoughts that might seriously jeopardize a "good job" for those involved in this kind of para-church organization. But we cannot

allow personal comforts and preferences to rule our conversation. For if the church IS an essential element of the gospel, and if God has in his infinite wisdom determined the means of grace as they are to be integrated within one organization wherein Christ is head, then to do anything that would in any way compromise or compete with such an organization would be at some level to compete with Christ as head! This is why the conversation is important, most especially for those who are sincere in their desire to follow Christ.

Advice to Those Who Participate in a Para-church Organization

We believe that a person who desires to place his or her life under the care and oversight of a local church is doing the proper thing to satisfy the Great Commission and that this ought never to be considered as hindering or competing with the para-church, whose mission by definition is to assist the church. Since the mission of the church and para-church ought to be complementary and not competing, so should an individual's involvement be coordinated in order to assist each in its proper mission.

Appendix C Who May Join the Church?

From the Reformed and Presbyterian perspective, we believe that the church consists of "all believers and their children." We distinguish two kinds of faith, confirmed and unconfirmed. We believe in "believers'" baptism so as to include both those who have professed faith and those who are either too young or mentally underdeveloped but are in relation to the church by God's election of them into the household of God via their family. And we believe that membership into the church is by baptism. Thus, to the question, "who may join the church" we respond with "all those who may be baptized--believers and their children." Yet this is not the place to defend this view. As has been already published in this series under the title *A Baptism That Saves*, I have argued from the reformed and sacramental doctrine of baptism that the church consists of those with both a confirmed and unconfirmed faith. So at present we wish to address the issue of communicant membership. For surely one of the most frequently asked questions is "who ought to properly partake of the Lord's supper?" Keep in mind that with the reformed view of effectual calling, we are not necessarily asking "who has faith?" but rather "who has confirmed faith?" The question is of great importance then to both the parent and the church as applied to covenant children especially and Christian conversion in general. In a phrase, our answer is usually something like, "all who have a credible profession of faith." The simple intent of this appendix is to explain exactly what we mean by this phrase.

It should be said from the beginning that we desire to walk a straight and principled line between

being too restrictive on the one hand and being too relaxed on the other. For one, we know that the Lord's table is for sinners who are in need of God's grace. We also understand that the Lord's table, insofar as it is an earthly expression of its heavenly reality, ought to be representative of the one holy and catholic church, as biblically defined. Since this heavenly or "catholic" church consists of members that participate in various denominations on earth, we desire that our earthly communion at the Lord's table be inter-denominational in character. Another way of saying this is that we believe admittance to the Lord's table ought to be as wide as the gospel itself is wide. (Among other things, this means that people can join a church who do not necessarily understand or endorse certain denominational distinctions because membership is defined by our participation in the Lord's table.) Whereas we would not want to suggest that the only important doctrines are those doctrines that all denominations can agree upon, we do recognize that there are certain doctrines which are required in order to have a genuinely *Christian* faith as opposed to some other faith. Moreover, those who are admitted to the Lord's table do not necessarily need to know many of the teachings of scripture that will eventually enable them to grow in Christian maturity. For this reason, the conditions for participating in the Lord's supper will be very different than, say, the conditions required for being a church elder or deacon.

I have noticed over the years that when a person discovers something new and exciting, he or she can tend to wear it like a rain coat--or a repellent, if you will. I would therefore encourage us all to hold our denominational convictions with grace. We need to recognize that those who differ with us concerning many things do not necessarily differ concerning the fundamental teachings of the New Covenant. So for example, it is true that if logically applied, the non-sacramental view of baptism would seem to erode the very gospel itself. But people are not always logical. They *can* hold to a doctrine that if logically worked out would contradict other doctrines that might call to question their sincere faith even. So I believe it would be a mistake to conclude that for a person to deny a sacramental means of grace in baptism would therefore be to deny grace as initiated by God in effectual calling.

It seems that Paul recognized that people may in fact be inconsistent and still be accepted as brothers and sisters in Christ. His point in Romans 14 is to distinguish between the "weak and the strong" yet not so as to reject the weak. Those who believed that eating meat offered to "idols" was to defile themselves were holding to a "weak" position according to Paul--since this would logically assume that the false gods really existed. Paul says that logically speaking, idols don't exist such that the food offered them are offered to non-existing beings. How could something non-existing defile something that exists? Now I suppose that for the sake of polemics, it would have been convenient to say that for those who believed that foods offered to idols were in effect believing that idols do really exist. And I suppose that they could therefore logically conclude that they were denying the existence of God, or something like this. But Paul wouldn't allow for such rhetorically motivated spins to impact the unity within the church. He said, "therefore receive one another."

In our humble opinion, the "other" denomination is "weak" in its peculiar doctrine, but this is not to say that these other denominations reject the essence of the gospel necessarily. And we should therefore receive into membership in the church those whom Christ receives unto himself insofar as they are willing to promote the peace and purity of our church under biblical authority. We therefore welcome those of other denominations to share with us in our Lord's table while in this present age, because this is the ultimate and highest evidence of our genuine Christian affection for one another. We believe that while denominationalism is a necessary way for conviction to be held and practiced, we do not believe denominationalism

negates the fundamental unity that we enjoy in Christ. And we believe this ought to be expressed in church membership up until a person would threaten the peace and purity of the church by an unwillingness to submit to the local church on relevant issues. We believe that those for whom Christ died have rights to all the privileges of membership in the Kingdom of God--and this includes access to the means of grace *within* the church of Jesus Christ.

For this reason, we ought not only to admit people who confess other denominational standards into our churches, but to treat them with the charity they deserve. We should do this even as we remain loyal to our own denominational distinctives, expecting them to submit one to another in the context of a particular church. Furthermore, we should avoid the temptation put upon us by such controversies to become "single-issue churches." Our sermons and our discourses ought necessarily to cover the breadth of reformed thinking and not be bogged down on any one issue in the church. I believe it is a sure way to have a very unhealthy church to become so single-minded about anything except Christ and all that He means with respect to His complete work for the church as our prophet, priest, and king.

I should note however one important discrimination with respect to our different views as worked out within the church. Because it IS required that the leaders of our churches have a "sound doctrine" as according to our system of faith, and since other denominational views are not of "sound doctrine" according to our church confession, we might therefore not be able to qualify a person of another denominational conviction to hold a ruling office in our churches. Again, each issue must be taken on its own merits to determine this as compared to our system as a whole.

Having then discerned that our policy about the Lord's table ought to be in effect as "wide as the gospel is wide" we should then require enough evidence so that the church does not irresponsibly mislead a person into thinking she is a Christian only to discover at judgment that she is not. While no person or church is infallible, it has been given to the church to declare what the Scriptures do teach about salvation and to apply these declarations as standards for who should be admitted to the Lord's table. Such conditions or terms ought to be as inclusive and as exclusive as the terms which are necessary toward being a true disciple of Christ. Notice then at least three relevant issues.

1. What do we know about *false* professions of faith so as to avoid confusion with a *true* profession of faith?
2. What constitutes a *Credible Profession of Christian Faith*?--This includes a discussion on:
 - a. How much does a person need to understand so as to have a distinctively *Christian* profession of faith?
 - b. What about a person's lifestyle is necessary so as to constitute a *credible* or *sincere* profession of faith?
3. What should we look for developmentally in a covenant child for communicant membership?
4. What is the role of the local/visible church to the individual in the determination of a "credible profession of Christian faith" and admission to the Lord's table?

1. Some Evidences Indicating False Conversions:

Christ warned "that not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord" shall enter into the Kingdom of God." The following then describe three categories of false professions of faith.

a. Decisions that are motivated by natural sympathies rather than those sympathies that are distinctively Christian in nature are not saving sympathies: Examples,

a. Want to please parents

b. Want to be included in the "group."

(albeit a youth group or any other social group)

c. Want to be "successful": This would be to confuse a natural sympathy, perhaps even a selfish one, with a genuine sympathy for Christ and His Kingdom. An example would be becoming a Christian in order that God will "bless" me in worldly ways such as becoming more popular, more wealthy, a better athlete, etc.

b. Decisions motivated merely by aesthetic experience are not necessarily evidence of true Christian conversion:

Decisions that are more the result of an aesthetic experience are those that are perhaps contrived by a combination of drama, music, and/or some natural artistry whereby an emotional experience is confused with genuine conversion. While all true conversion will effect the emotions in some way, true Christian conversion is always characterized and governed by a distinctly Christian content of knowledge that leads to true repentance and faith. Therefore, simply "making a decision" is not necessarily evidence of a genuine Christian conversion by itself. Almost every religion has some corollary. There must be some accompanying truth about ourselves in relation to God that is believed and is distinctively Christian in nature.

c. Conversions motivated from a natural sorrow rather than a Godly sorrow don't indicate true conversion: (2 Cor. 7:10)

These are decisions that are moved merely by the fear of punishment for sin and not also a genuine desire to be made more and more holy. This would indicate that a person has not yet understood the nature of sin and its violation to God's holy affections. It would be seeking a salvation from the punishments of sin only but not necessarily a salvation from sin itself (Romans 7:24; 8:2). This often leads to real difficulties in the areas of Christ's lordship in a person.

2. Evidence of a Credible Profession of Faith:

A credible profession of faith is often described in the Bible as representing both repentance and faith.

Acts 20:21 as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus.

Heb. 6:1 Therefore let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God.

As such, true conversion consist of both a negative and positive element. *Repentance* is turning away from something that is understood to be a false confidence whereas *faith* is to embrace our true confidence unto salvation--in the Christian sense then turning away from self-confidence and idolatry so as to embrace Christ as the only Redeemer from sin and its misery. James reminds us, both repentance and faith have a cognitive and behavioral dynamic. For instance, James notes, "I by my works will show you my faith." This means that for those whom God has called into everlasting life through faith in Christ, God will also enable them to

persevere in faith as evidenced by growth in Christian faith *and* practice. Faith, therefore, is more than merely assent, since it presupposes a willingness to trust and act upon what is known. Likewise, even as repentance presupposes a certain element of knowledge about what is considered to be wrong, it is only fully repentance when a person's practice is reflected in a turning away from that which is considered to be bad. So as to more fully understand both the cognitive and behavioral dynamic to what constitutes a *credible profession of Christian faith*, we will consider each in its own turn.

A. How much does a person need to understand so as to have a distinctively Christian profession of faith?

Notice that what is not being asked is what a person must understand so as to be an officer, or even a mature Christian. Rather, the question gets at that knowledge that a person should self-consciously possess so as to demonstrate satisfactory evidence to being a true Christian disciple. In summary, a person should understand and believe the following five things:

Note: How a person articulates these elements of the gospel is less important than that they are in some manner understood. I have footnoted the appropriate Shorter Catechism number from our church standards (Westminster Confession and Shorter and Larger Catechisms) for further reference and clarification.

1. That there is a God and He is our Sovereign Creator such that we are responsible to Him for all our actions:

Acts 24, 25, The God who made the world and everything in it is he who is Lord of heaven and earth... he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things... indeed he is not far from us.

2. That all have sinned against God and a recognition of how we have personally sinned against God with respect to specific sins against God's commands:

1 John 1:8-9, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.

3. That Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human such as to qualify as the only true Mediator between God and humanity:

1 John 2:23, Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? No one who denies the Son has the Father, everyone who confesses the Son has the Father.

1 John 4:2, By this you know the Spirit of God, every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

4. That Jesus Christ accomplished everything necessary to bring to us our salvation from sin and misery:

a. He has revealed God and his will to us for our salvation (a prophet in representing God to us).

John 1:1,14, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Heb. 1:1, Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.

b. He has become our substitute in taking upon himself our penalty for sin and bringing us into a righteous judicial status with God. (He is our priest in representing us to God!)

1 John 1:7, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin...

1 John 2:1b-2, if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins...

c. He is our ruler and king to govern and protect us.

1 John 2:3, Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever say's "I have come to know him, but does not obey his commandments is a liar and in such a person the truth does not exist.

5. God's promise of salvation is by grace through faith in Christ such that we do not trust in our own ability to satisfy God's righteous standard, but trust in Christ to do this for us.

1 John 1:25, And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.

Eph. 2:8, For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

Romans 5:1, Therefore since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.

In summary, faith means that we trust God's provisions alone for the forgiveness of sins. The biblical idea is to rest completely upon God so that we no longer depend on our own righteousness but on the righteousness of Christ. God's provision has been accomplished by Christ since Christ took our penalty for sin and kept the law for us.

B. What about a person's lifestyle is necessary so as to constitute a *credible or sincere* profession of faith?

Those whom God has saved through faith in Christ are also more and more made to be holy. It should be noted up front that one aspect of this holiness will be growing in our knowledge of sin such that grace abounds all the more! (Rom.5:20). Yet we should also expect to see God gradually perfect us in holiness even as we anticipate the final consummation of this perfection not in this life but in the life to come. Therefore, a second element of true Christian conversion is a life characterized by turning away from sin as it is defined by the Bible and a life characterized by turning more and more to Christ for help in being saved from actual sins themselves. This sanctification, no less than justification, is a free and unmerited gift of God. It is not so as to enjoy greater privileges, it is itself one of the great privileges of our adoption. That is to say that true Christian salvation is not only a salvation from the penalty of sin (or "justification"), but also a salvation from sin_s. As taught in Titus "for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, *instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires.*" It is grace that saves us from the condemnation of sin, and the grace that even now begins its work in us to save us from sins and their corresponding miseries. According to the Bible this latter salvation from sin_s has already begun in so far as we are being made more and more into the likeness of Christ's holiness (sanctification). Yet in the present age, we know that our salvation is not yet complete until we are joined with Christ in the age to come

whereby we will be perfected in holiness (our glorification). The scripture describes such a life as being:

1. Characterized by a life of obedience:

1 John 5:2, By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.

2. Characterized by a life of perseverance so that even as we grow to see our sin more and more we also continue to embrace Christ for the forgiveness of our sin. God perseveres for us even as this is worked into us through the gift of grace as by the Holy Spirit. Whereas assurance can at times diminish because it is related to our own subjective state as related to God, our salvation is never diminished, nor does God's perseverance for us diminish. Subjectively speaking, assurance grows more and more over time as we walk faithfully in Christ and see God's grace working in us to enable us to embrace Christ.

Heb.4:14, We are partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.

Mat.10:22, He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved.

1 John 2:28, And now little children, abide in him, so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming.

Of course a young Christian would not have much in terms of this kind of evidence, yet it is important to emphasize that ultimately, *the crucial test of true conversion is endurance to the end*. In so far as a person puts his or her hope and trust in Christ alone for salvation, and is not willfully disobedient to Christ (see below), that person is assured of his/her salvation. But while God's election is sure so as to never be thwarted, our subjective assurance can at times be shaken when we are in willful disobedience to God. Another way of saying this is that while a person cannot lose his salvation, since our salvation rests in the sovereign work of God in and for us, our subjective assurance can be shaken at times in so far as we fail to persevere in the faith. The idea is that those whom God saves do indeed persevere till the end--and this itself is God's doing. While perhaps one aspect of the Holy Spirit's work is to confirm in us our salvation, that confirmation is at least partly related to His work of enabling us to persevere in the faith. A persevering Christian is characterized not by the absence of struggle against sin, but rather such a struggle that indicates a sincere willingness to be made more and more holy.

It needs to be made clear at this point that a credible profession of faith is NOT a perfect and sinless life. Rather a credible profession of faith is represented in a person who has recognized his or her sin and consequently the need for God's grace and forgiveness--and whose sincerity is evidenced by an ultimate *will* to be sinless while at the same time struggling against sin and sinful desires. In other words, a credible faith is characterized by a life void of *willful* sinning. *Willful* sinning is characterized by behaviors which involve premeditation. For example, it is one thing for a person to struggle with lustful desires (which would be handled with great care and intentionality), it is another thing to actually act upon those desires so as to go out and purchase pornography or even worse, engage in sexual sins. Admittedly, the distinction between willful sin and struggling against sin is sometimes hard to distinguish--all the more reason to be in consultation with those who are authorized in the church to give oversight to the communion table so

as to help a person not bring further condemnation upon himself as noted in 1 Cor.11:27. (See below on the relation of individuals to the church.) Our point here is that there is evidence of sincerity is indicated by a person who is genuine in her desire not to sin and genuine in her resting not in herself but in God for the forgiveness of sin.

C. What are the developmental considerations for covenant children being admitted as communicant members?

From the reformed and sacramental view of Christian baptism, we are not necessarily looking for a decision as if this happens at one specific time or moment. (See *A Baptism that Saves.*) Nor are we looking for faith as if in contrast to a previous state of unbelief. When informed by our Reformed doctrine of effectual calling through the regeneration of God, we know that God's saving grace may in fact begin in your child while in a state of infancy and gradually effect itself into the life of the child. We are therefore looking for a *confirmed* faith over against just "faith." In short, the instructions of Paul relating to the proper participation of the Lord's supper apply here: "*let a man examine himself*" (1 Cor. 11:28).

Our question then with respect to our children is not only whether they have a credible profession of faith, but whether they are capable of self-examination with respect to it. This is in large measure a developmental issue and not just a spiritual issue. Has the child come to an awareness of him/herself as distinct from his/her parents? Ordinarily, this happens during the teenage years, perhaps alongside of the child working through his/her personal identity about his/her religious convictions. We should therefore give our children some time to sort all this out! I suspect that many a reformed parent is still motivated, if unconsciously, by the false idea that "I am waiting for my child to become a Christian--sooner rather than later." The parent is still emotionally tied to the revivalistic notion that a person is not saved until he makes a public and personal profession of faith. I have tried to dispel this myth even as proved by the simple fact that John was filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth (Luke 1:15). Your covenant child is saved by the waters of regeneration! (Until evidence would suggest otherwise). So why the rush if motivated by a desire for our children to be saved? This is not to suggest that we don't want them to participate in the Lord's supper. We know that it IS a spiritual benefit for the renewal of faith. But as a renewal rite, it ought to be attached to a person's self-awareness of his or her spiritual condition as related to Christ's death and resurrection.

I am afraid that many well-intentioned parents actually push their children to hypocrisy by pushing them to make a public profession of faith and communicant membership. For example, I suspect that if I asked my young teenager to be examined today for communicant membership, that out of his love and respect for me and his sincere faith at this point regarding the saving work of Christ, he would probably be willing to do it. But would this be right for him at this point? Might this push him to a kind of religion that is related to the Lord's table but without personal sincerity and genuineness? Might this create the kind of plausibility structure that makes it easier, not harder, for a person to play the religious games without sincerity, leading eventually to a crisis of faith in an attempt to be authentic? Therefore, I would not desire for my child to be examined by the elders until it becomes my child's own desire after he has a developed conviction that his faith is distinguished from the faith of his parents. And sometimes this requires some time to sort out. Through his interactions with unbelieving friends, through temptations that will increasingly be out of the range of parental oversight, and by simply becoming more self-aware, my teenager will discover a nature within himself that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's

effectual calling more than parental influence. Over time, the child will discover that he/she both believes in Christ and recognizes the implications of this with respect to his/her living "in the world but not of the world" (at least in a categorical sense). While the child could never hope to anticipate the kinds of trials and struggles that await him in the future, he can understand that this is part of what it means to take up his cross and follow after Christ. And I want my child to be aware of this when partakes of Christ at His table.

It seems then that what Paul was after in 1 Corinthians was for believers to examine themselves with respect to the meaning of the Lord's table as compared to their ultimate hope and their manner of life. Notice for instance that Paul's exhortation to self-examination is related to idolatry and schism (Chapter 10). He states in summary, "Therefore, my brethren, flee from idolatry... Is it not the cup of blessing that we bless a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:14, 16-17). All of this gets at the very simple requirement that those admitted to Christ table ought therefore to be capable of discerning the Lord's body and blood as related to themselves and the cost of discipleship.

All of this raises the question of how to determine this kind of self-conscious faith. For one, speaking as a member of an elders' board, I always encourage the parents to let the child communicate her desire to the pastor or one of the elders of the church rather than having the parent do this for her. We are looking for an adult faith as indicated by the adult activity of taking personal responsibility for the things we do. Second, I will seek to discern a personal and self-conscious faith by asking some of the following kinds of questions. (It should be noted that the questions ought to be asked while carefully distinguishing these questions from a kind of works-righteousness kind of program. What we are not saying is that confirmed faith is because of these things, but rather these things are some of the signs of a person being self-motivated and self-conscious in their faith) So for instance:

1. Do you ever read the Bible without your parent telling you? Do you pray?
2. Would you come to church even if your parents didn't make you?
3. How do you see yourself in relation to the Lord's supper? Are there particular sins that you see being put to death in Christ because you are forgiven? Are there particular challenges that face you in following after Christ? Etc.
4. Have you ever had the opportunity to tell a friend about what it means to be a Christian? Have you ever been in a situation where being a Christian put you in a social bind or caused tension with your peers? How did you handle this?

Again, the point of these questions is NOT to suggest that anyone is a Christian because he or she says yes to any of these things. Nor are we looking for what might be a mature faith or response as related to the above questions. Rather we are looking for some evidence of sincerity related to the ability to examine oneself with respect to the faith. These are simply the kinds of questions that might help a parent and/or session distinguish self-awareness about a child's Christian faith in relation to his or her own convictions and life.

Suggested Readings

Theology of the Church

Bannerman, James. *The Church of Christ, A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960.

Clowney, Edmund. *The Church*. Illinois: Downers Grove, 1995.

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Gillespie, George. *One Hundred and Eleven Propositions Concerning the Ministry and Government of the Church*. Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver Boyd, 1844. Reprint,

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Owen, John. "An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order and Communion of Evangelical Churches," and especially, "Duty of Believers to Join in Church-Order." *The Works of John Owen*. Volume 15. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983.

Robinson, Stuart. *The Church of God, and Essential Element of the Gospel and the Idea, Structure, and Functions Thereof*. Philadelphia: Joseph Wison, 1858. Reprint forthcoming, edited by Preston D. Graham, Jr., *A Stuart Robinson Biography and Reader*.

Witherow, Thomas. *The Apostolic Church*. Reprinted, Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990.

Pressing Toward The Mark, Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, ed. Dennison and Gamble

Vos, Geerhardus, *The Kingdom Of God And The Church*,

Biblical Theology Redemptive Historical Hermeneutic

Kline, Meredith, *Images Of The Spirit* (Kline, '86)

-----, *Kingdom Prologue* (Kline, '89)

Lints, Richard, *The Fabric of Theology, A Prolegomenon To Evangelical Theology* (Eerdmans, '93)

Vos, Geerhardus, *Biblical Theology* (Eerdmans, '48)

Clowney, Edmund, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Eerdmans, '91)

LaRondelle, *The Israel Of God In Prophecy* (Andrews University Press, '83)

Church Planting (Strategy)

Jones, E. *Strategies For New Churches*. (Harper and Row, 1976)

Spradley, James P. *The Ethnographic Interview*. (Holt and Winston, 1979)

Schaller's, Lyle, ed. *Center-city Churches*. (Abington, 1993)

_____. *44 Questions For Church Planters*. (Abington, 1991)

Also consult with the Mission to North America, Presbyterian Church in America for support materials and Church Planting Training Conferences.

Church Membership and Basic Christianity

Michael Horton, *Putting The Amazing Back Into Grace*.

A Manual For New Members. Presbyterian Church in America.
Atlanta: Christian Education and Publications.

Stott, John. *Christian Basics, A Handbook of Beginnings, Beliefs and Behavior*. (Baker Books, 1991)

Paul Helm, *The Callings*.

Pastoral Ministry

Samuel Miller, *Thoughts On Public Prayer*.

_____, *Doctrinal Integrity*.

R. L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*.

John Leith, *From Generation to Generation*.

Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*.

_____, Baxter's Practical Works, *A Christian Directory*.