

EARNESTLY CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH...

A PUBLICATION OF THE TACOMA BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH, 5 SOUTH G STREET, TACOMA, WA 98405

FEBRUARY 2009

VOLUME 1

Welcome to this new publication! It is our prayer that you will find the contents of “Earnestly Contending for the Faith” edifying and useful in your Christian walk.

The Bible Presbyterian Church has a long and proud history of “earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints.” This bi-monthly publication, we hope, will be found to be solidly in that tradition and we ask for your prayers as we undertake this project.

These are challenging days and it is important that the believer be fully equipped to serve Christ faithfully and ...be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ (1 Peter 3:15-16).

We hope this little newsletter will help towards that end, as well as clarify some of the issues of the day—including those within our own family.

MISSION STATEMENT SERIES—PART ONE

BEHOLDING GOD—PSALM 27:4 by G. W. Fisher, Sr.

THE INTRODUCTION ...

Some years ago, a young boy who had been born blind was operated on by a skilled physician who was a close friend of the Rev. A.D. Vail. When the boy's bandages were ready to be removed, Vail's friend invited him into the surgery to observe the outcome.

The surgeon rolled the gauze off the boy's brow and gathered it into a ball in his hand. The little fellow bobbed his head and moved it from side to

side, but the pads still held his lids shut. The doctor took them in his fingers and pulled them from the boy's eyes. He opened them, but quickly shut them because even the muted light of the dim room burned them, but with a few blinks he was able to look around.

There were a few moments of tense silence as the boy looked out upon the faces of friends and family whom

he had never seen—he saw the people there, but did not know one from another and was momentarily bewildered by this group of people standing in front of him. You can imagine the wonder he experienced because he had never seen a human form or face before. He was uncertain until his mother spoke. Softly she asked, “Willie, can you see?”

At that moment he recognized the sweet voice that now had a face, and, pulling himself out of the chair and throwing himself into her arms, he replied,

“O mother, is this heaven? ”

Such a scene obviously tugs at the heart, but I would call your attention to the moment when he could see but could not discern what it was he was seeing. It was not until he heard and recognized his mother’s voice that he came to his senses and ran to her with obvious joy and delight.

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TOGETHER.



Thomas Boston

As we have said so many times, the creation speaks clearly of God’s goodness, His power and His wisdom, but it is the Word of God that clarifies the picture, and it is the Spirit of God, working in our hearts by that Word, which brings the truth to light. It is the Word that puts a face to the reality.

The Word of God gives to us a clear, reliable and sweet revelation of the living God we worship together.

A little more than a year ago, the session permitted me to travel to New York to meet with other men from around

the country to discuss a number of things, including the development of a mission statement that might give some direction to the denomination for the future. It was not an attempt to depart from anything, but rather to bring into a clearer focus all that we have been, and hope to be, in the service of our God and King. This statement was discussed further during a meeting prior to the 2007 synod and was chosen by the moderator to be the theme of the 2008 General Synod in August of that year. Whether it is ever adopted by the church as a whole or not, it certainly presents a blessed outline and challenge for the future of the church.

This mission statement begins with this basic, introductory declaration:

The chief passion of the Bible Presbyterian Church, as a body of

warm-hearted Calvinists, is to **Behold** God, **Pursue** godliness, and **Proclaim** Christ to the entire world.

King David cried out saying...

Ps 73:25-28 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. 26 My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. 28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, That I may declare all Your works.

It is this spirit that stands at the heart of this opening article.

Dissecting this statement, we find, firstly, that we as a body of believers ought to have a chief passion and that passion ought to be related to what we believe and who we are.

I think that most of us are aware of what the Westminster Shorter Catechism states is the chief end of man. The Larger Catechism expands the commonly known answer just slightly,

Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.

It is appropriate then, that a body of believers, covenanted together for the glory of God, hold as their chief passion, beholding the God they love.

...they that know him not, can never glorify him: and they that esteem any person or thing more than, or as much as him, dishonour him. We glorify him by our wills, choosing him as our portion and our chief good, as he really is in himself; by our affections loving him, and rejoicing and delighting in him above every other.

THOMAS BOSTON

We maintain that the pursuit of godliness is the natural result of beholding God in His Word.

The study of holiness says, God is holy; mourning for every slip says, God is spotless; walking holily in all manner of conversation, within and without, says, God is omniscient and omnipresent. THOMAS BOSTON

We further assert that the pursuit of godliness that springs from beholding God in His Word will naturally result in a passion to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ to the world.

Secondly, we hope and pray to be found warm-hearted Calvinists. I must confess a little reluctance to put that modifier on our Calvinism because that system of doctrine commonly known as Calvinism is nothing more than a systematic presentation of Scripture doctrine, which is, by its very nature, warm-hearted.

But, in this case, it expresses an effort to communicate to the world at large the fact that our passion for the Living God is not cold and sterile doctrine, nor has our doctrine caused us to despise or dismiss a dying world, or our Christian brethren. Calvinists are often, out of ignorance,

erroneously suspected of these things. True Calvinism, however, is warm-hearted by its very nature. Calvin himself said plainly,

If we saw a beast at the point of perishing, we would have pity on it. And what shall we do when we see souls in peril, which are so precious before God, as he has shown in that he has ransomed them with the blood of his own Son? If we see then a poor soul going thus to perdition, ought we not to be moved with compassion and kindness, and should we not desire God to apply the remedy?
JOHN CALVIN

Now, obviously, for us to be able to say this with any kind of conviction, we must be able to say it with sincerity and to do that, we certainly ought to have some understanding of exactly what we mean when we say it! And this brings us to the meat of the matter—that is, exactly what do we mean by these things...

BEHOLDING GOD

PURSUING GODLINESS and

PROCLAIMING CHRIST

BEHOLDING GOD

We begin, in this issue, to define what we mean by **beholding God**.

In Psalm 27:4, we read...

One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple.

Note first of all, David's **Passion**.

One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek:

David has a desire, and the sincerity of that desire is evidenced by his reaction to that desire—he desires it; therefore, he will seek it. Literally, there is one thing he wants, and he will do whatever is necessary to get it.

Spurgeon says,

Divided aims tend to distraction, weakness, disappointment. The man of one book is eminent; the man of one pursuit is successful. Let all our affections be bound up in one affection, and that affection set upon heavenly things.



Ch. Spurgeon

CHARLES SPURGEON

Then, you notice too, from whom he desires it—from the Lord. This implies that his pursuit involves 1) prayer, and 2) the use of all ordained means.

This is the right target for desires, this is the well into which to dip our buckets, this is the door to knock at, the bank to draw upon.

CHARLES SPURGEON

If we ask why David made this his one desire, the answer may be found in three things...

1) No higher aim is worthy of such dedication.

Philippians 3:7-11 ...what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count



Richard Baxter

them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Rise up, O men of God!

Have done with lesser things.

Give heart and mind and soul and strength

To serve the King of kings.

MERRILL

2) It is the great single end of all of life; why strike for a mid-point?

No race was ever won by the one who satisfied himself with merely making it halfway to the finish. Projects may be broken into parts, but once the ultimate goal gets lost, the project bogs down and purpose wanes.

3) The pursuit of this brings everything else into its order and place.

Priorities are clarified: the frivolous, the inconsequential, and the vain all appear for what they are, while all the things that fulfill the aim take on their proper importance.

Deuteronomy 4:29 ...you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

The most difficult part of heavenly contemplation is, to maintain a lively sense of heavenly things upon our hearts. It is easier merely to think of heaven a whole day, than to be lively and affectionate in those thoughts a quarter of an hour. - RICHARD BAXTER

Notice secondly, his **Desire**.

That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life,

David recognized the legitimacy of God's appointed means. God had promised he would meet His people there and so there David wanted to be. And because he was intent on his purpose, he sought to be where he needed to be for the blessings he sought.

To approach continually unto the temple, and thither continually to repair was the dwelling, no doubt, here meant; to dwell, to reside

continually there, not to come for a spurt or a fit... JOHN DAY

The Holy Spirit admonishes the same when He says,

Hebrews 10:24-25 ...let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Richard Sibbes says it so beautifully, when he asks...

Where is a man so familiar as in his house? and what other place hath he such care to protect and provide for as his house? and he lays up his treasures and his jewels in his house. So God lays up all the treasures of grace and comfort in the visible church. In the church he is to be spoken with as a man in his house. RICHARD SIBBES

And finally, mark his **Purpose**.

To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple.

David had a purpose in wanting to be planted in the house of the Lord—it was so that He could look upon his God, that is, contemplate Him in the beauty of His attributes through the revelation of Himself in His Word.

With an eye of faith and holy love we with pleasure behold this beauty, and observe more and more in it that is amiable, that is admirable. When with fixedness of thought, and a holy flame of devout affections, we contemplate God's glorious excellencies, and entertain ourselves with the tokens of his

peculiar favour to us, this is that view of the beauty of the Lord which David here covets,

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and it is to be had in his ordinances, for there he manifests himself. MATTHEW HENRY

When we speak in this mission statement of our chief passion being, in part, to behold God, we are implying a desire to be found in the house of the Lord. There is the further implication that we are not trying, as some do, to exclude from worship God-ordained, but man despised, ordinances. Neither are we striving to maintain that which merely rests upon tradition, rather than God's prescription.

In Zechariah 9:17 we read,

For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!

As beauty among men consists in the symmetry of parts, so in God it is the harmony of all the divine perfections. JOHN OWEN

In His Word, God beautifully unveils a grand picture of himself; this He does by outright statement, as in...

Exodus 34:4-7 Then Moses rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him; and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone. 5 Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. 6 And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

He also does it by showing all men who He is by His actions and that, chiefly through the Person of His Son...

John 14:9-11 He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. 11 Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

And, He communicates His glory and Person to us through His promises...

...if God teach us by the promises what he is, and what he will be unto us, we have firm ground to expect from him all fruits of benignity, kindness, and love. Let the soul frame in itself that idea of God which is exhibited in the promises, and it will powerfully prevail with it to continue in an expectation of his gracious returns; they all expressing goodness, love, patience, forbearance, long-suffering, pardoning mercy, grace, bounty, with a full satisfactory reward. This is the beauty of the Lord mentioned with admiration by the prophet, "How great is his goodness! how great is his Beauty!" Zechariah 9:17; which is the great attractive of the soul to adhere constantly unto him. JOHN OWEN

And this revelation draws out of the hearts of His own, not just admiration, but faith and confidence.

But in his word it is that God hath made that revelation of himself wherein the souls of men may fully acquiesce; upon it hath he left an impression of all his excellencies, that we might learn to "glorify him as God." JOHN OWEN

There is some liability that may be attached to David's prayer. Consider this passage in Isaiah:

Isaiah 17:4-7 "In that day it shall come to pass

That the glory of Jacob will wane,

And the fatness of his flesh grow lean.

5 It shall be as when the harvester gathers the grain, And reaps the heads with his arm;

It shall be as he who gathers heads of grain

In the Valley of Rephaim. 6 Yet gleaning grapes will be left in it, Like the shaking of an olive tree,

Two or three olives at the top of the uppermost bough, Four or five in its most fruitful branches,"

Says the LORD God of Israel. 7 In that day a man will look to his Maker, And his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel.

For a generation of believers to be able to behold the beauty of the Lord, it may be necessary that the brightness of all that detracts from Him be dimmed. In other words, a season of leanness in earthly comforts may be required for the heart to be free to see and love God as it should.

At best, any clear view we have of Him here will be sporadic. As Jonathan Edwards said,

Herein is a great difference in the manner in which the saints have the discoveries of God's glory, and that wherein they shall see him hereafter. Hereafter they shall dwell in his presence, they shall be fixed in an everlasting view of the glory of God, their eye shall be perpetually feasted with a full vision of his face; but here, when the saints have extraordinary discoveries of the glory of God, they are transient and short; sometimes it is only a glance; Christ stands behind the wall for the most part, and when he shows himself it is through the lattice as passing by a

“READER, PRAY THAT GOD WOULD CREATE IN YOU A LONGING TO HAVE SUCH A SIGHT OF HIS HOLINESS AS WILL CAUSE YOU TO CRINGE AT EVEN THE SMALLEST SIN AND TO FALL ON YOUR FACES BEFORE HIM IN UNGUARDED THANKSGIVING FOR HIS GRACE TO YOU IN JESUS CHRIST.

window, but hereafter they shall be in his presence-chamber with him. Here the saints see God as passing by before them, and then he is gone.

- JONATHAN EDWARDS

As the beloved of God we should pray that the Lord would allow us, not just as individuals, but as a body of believers, to see Him more clearly, more brightly, more distinctly. That He would permit us a sight of Him in His Word that so clearly reveals the beauty of His attributes as to be so enchanting, so overwhelming, that we would truly find ourselves lost in love, and praise and wonder.

O that you might see Him in such a bright and glorious display of His everlasting holiness and righteousness as to be utterly overcome—that you might be awed and stunned into silence before His purity and its beauty—that the dull scenes and distractions of this world would simply melt away at the sight of His glory. Reader, pray that God

would create in you a longing to have such a sight of His holiness as will cause you to cringe at even the smallest sin and to fall on your faces before Him in unguarded thanksgiving for His grace to you in Jesus Christ.

O that you might see Him in the awesome witness of His power so as to be undone by the clear sight you are allowed to have of His sovereignty and ability to do all His holy will and to accomplish all He has promised. I pray that He would give to you such an understanding of His might that you would see the kingdoms of the world as impotent before Him, and yourselves as helpless before Him and His will.

And then, there is His great wisdom and knowledge—O that He would give you to see, from the testimony of His Word, the infinite extent of His Knowledge and the depths of His wisdom. A grasp of this truth concerning God that would be so compelling that you would acknowledge freely your ignorance, and adopt, not as a quaint saying, but as a motto for life, the admonition of the wisest of men...

Proverbs 3:5-8 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own Understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. 8 It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones.

Pray too, that you might get a good look at His justice and judgment; that

you might see how pure and holy this judgment really is—how it throws the silly concepts that men have of equity and justice into the realm of being ridiculous. It is one of the absurdities of mankind that he believes himself fit to sit as a judge over God and His actions.

Some reading this may suspect themselves to be wiser than God and more benevolent. I pray that God Himself will show you, by the revelation of Himself in His Word, what real justice is and what true mercy looks like.

And that brings us to His love and His mercy. Perhaps God would be pleased to bring us as a people to the place where Job was brought—that with fresh and clearer manifestations of His love and mercy, we may fall to our knees in sackcloth and ashes and admit that what we think we know about love and mercy in Jesus Christ is nothing compared to the reality.

I long to see the day when God's people will not be bored with reflecting on His love and His goodness—the day when our hearts will melt at the mention of His name. We should all be praying that the Body of Christ might see Him with such clarity and glory so as to walk about, as it were, with the glow that Moses had when He came down off the mountain of God.

Though every saint has not this longing desire after God to the same degree that the psalmist had, yet they are all of the same spirit; they earnestly desire to have more of his presence in their hearts. That this is the temper of the godly in general, and not of

some particular saints only, appears from Isaiah 26:8, 9. where not any particular saint, but the church in general speaks thus: "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee, the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night, and with my spirit within me will I seek thee early." JONATHAN EDWARDS

Only the Lord Himself can grant that His people behold His glory in His Word and become passionate about it. This is true whether we are speaking about the local church or an entire denomination, and I pray that our God will bless us with a general discontent until we find ourselves pleading with Him to grant us such a thing. It has happened before...

...it can happen again if it is His will!

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WHAT is TRUTH? — by Pastor Tito Lyro

Introduction

In John 18:38, Pontius Pilate asks Jesus the most important question he would ever ask of anyone: "What is truth?" The reason behind Pilate's question is not altogether known. Perhaps he was mocking Jesus (Calvin, 18:212). Or Pilate might have asked the question as a judge wanting to know more about the case he was judging. Perhaps he was even inquiring about truth as a student who indeed wanted to know what truth is (Henry, 5:1187). Whatever his reason was for asking Jesus this question, Pilate did not wait long enough to hear the answer.

Many in the so-called Christian community today are doing the same as Pilate did. They are asking what the truth is but are walking away from the only person who can answer the ultimate question, and buying into a philosophy known as Postmodernism.

The Truth according to Postmodernism

The caption above is misleading because there is no truth according to Postmodernism. While in the Modernist movement truth could be learned through the examination of facts, in the Postmodernist movement

there are no facts. There is no distinction between "truth-claims" and fiction. Truth only exists in our heads. Postmodernists feast in contradiction because it is inherent to all assertions of truth. "There is no truth. We should give up the search for truth and be content with interpretations. Philosophy is simply a continuing conversation about truth" (Richard Rorty).

The impact of the lack of absolute truth is devastating to many areas of practical living. Postmodernism sees the family as a system forming different personality roles which later causes problems to society.

Postmodernism also believes that a religious tradition or philosophical system commits acts of cultural tyranny if it promotes the "fiction" that there is one unified and absolute truth. Because truth is in the eye of the beholder, so to speak, all cultures should be empowered to preserve their unique cultural reality. Any effort to reform a culture by preaching the Gospel is really repression, domination, and colonizing of one group by another.

One last example is how Postmodernism defines Biblical interpretation. Interpretation depends

not on what the text says or what the author intended, but on how the reader reacts to a text. The meaning is constructed or created by the reader.

Biblical View of Truth Compared to Postmodernist View

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments declare that there is one absolute truth which is found in God (John 1:14; 1:17; 8:31-32; 14:6). On the other hand, Postmodernism teaches that there is no truth, just a collection of interpretations. The Bible sets forth God's authoritative decrees that must be followed by all people; Postmodernism suggests that there is

no encompassing rule to be followed, but each culture possesses its own truth. The Bible demands attention because all its accounts are true; Postmodernism teaches that the Bible is a collection of stories, and that the reader decides what they mean. The Bible proclaims that the absolute truth is embodied in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in whom salvation is found; Postmodernism declares that if one teaches that Jesus is the truth, he or she is an oppressor and a tyrant.

A Christian cannot be consistently biblical and a postmodernist at the same time. You must choose whom you are going to follow: the God of the Bible or the god of this world.

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