

HRA Reformation Voice

The Voice of the Heidelberg Reformation Association
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THIS ISSUE:

ENEMIES OF THE GOSPEL

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

<i>THE MINISTRY OF REBUKE</i> by Danny Hyde	2
<i>HUMBLE WARFARE</i> by Howard Sloan.....	4
<i>BOOK REVIEWS</i>	7
<i>NEWS, NOTES, AND PRAYER REQUESTS</i>	8

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THE MINISTRY OF REBUKE

by Danny Hyde

What is a pastor? Is he primarily to be thought of as a leader? You would think so if you pay attention to studies of what books pastors read. Is he primarily the chairman of the board, delegating to others the work to be done? You could draw this conclusion if you have spent any time in an evangelical church without elders. Is the pastor primarily a counselor who gives guidance and advice to spiritual seekers? Again, one could argue this is a prominent feature of American pastoral ministry.

When we turn to Paul's little pastoral epistle to Titus we learn that above all a pastor is a steward (Titus 1:7; *oikonomos*), that is, one who is entrusted with the care of the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15) until the owner and master returns. According to Paul, the way the pastor cares for the household is by means of the Word: "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). In fact, Titus 1:9 forms an outline for the rest of the letter on how Titus is to serve the Lord and serve his Church. In 1:10–16 Paul speaks of rebuking and in 2:1–14 of exhorting; then in 2:15 he reiterates his outline of exhorting and rebuking. Finally, in 3:1–8 Paul speaks of exhorting and then in 3:9–11 of rebuking.

As Christ's ministers, we know that the Lord of the house will return to "cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 52). Yet, since we are stewards of his house until that day, we are called not only to a ministry of exhortation to the friends of the Lord, but we are also called to a ministry of rebuke of the enemies of the Lord and the Church. Listen to how Paul speaks of this ministry of rebuke in Titus 1:10–16:

¹⁰For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. ¹¹They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

¹²One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." ¹³This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. ¹⁵To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. ¹⁶They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

In what follows, let me offer some words for meditation on the ministry of pastors towards the enemies of Christ and his Church in "this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4).

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The Problem in this Ministry

Titus and other "elders" (1:5; *presbuteros*) on the island of Crete faced a serious theological and practical problem, which Paul summarized for us in these verses. There were "many" false teachers whom Paul calls "insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers especially of the circumcision party" (1:10). These were "teaching . . . what they ought not to teach" (1:11), namely, "Jewish myths and the commands of people" (1:14). This false theology led to false piety: "upsetting whole families . . . both their minds and consciences are defiled . . . they deny [God] by their works" (1:11, 15, 16).

1. False Theology

Paul describes the false theology of the enemies through what he calls the teachers: "empty talkers" (1:10). Their theology had no substance; it could not sustain the souls of the sheep they sought to feed. Of course Paul says this in contrast to what Scripture says elsewhere about the true Word of God: it is milk (1 Peter 2:2), it is bread (John 6:35, 68), it is meat (Heb. 5:12–14). These substances communicate nutrition and sustaining power unlike these false teachers' theology that was nothing but junk food filled with empty calories. As Michael Horton said

in an interview with CBS, describing Joel Osteen's teaching: "I think it's a cotton candy gospel."¹

But who were they? When we re-read verse 10 it sounds like there were two groups: "many" and "especially those of the circumcision party." Yet contemporary research has shown that it is best to take the Greek adverb, *malista*, not as "especially" but as "in other words" or "that is." What Paul is saying, then, is that the false teachers were the "circumcision party," meaning, overly legalistic Jewish teachers.

So what were they teaching? They were teaching the law as legalism. Paul calls their teaching "Jewish myths" and "commands of people" (1:14). Their doctrines and commandments of men (Isa. 29:13; Mark 7:1-8) were what Paul described in Colossians:

"If with Christ you died to the elementary spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:20-23).

This theology was not only "upsetting whole families" (Titus 1:11) but it was done in a way that it benefited the teachers as they were teaching "for shameful gain" (Titus 1:11). Is there anything new under the sun? Preachers and churches charge large fees to hear all kinds of seminars and workshops of higher spiritual principles about food and drink and all kinds of abstinence.

2. False Piety

Theology always leads to piety, and false theology always leads to false piety. The false teachers were causing Christians to doubt whether they could eat pork or shellfish from the sea around Crete and whether they had to keep all the kosher food laws. This led to confusion and to consciences being violated. As Paul says, "To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing

is pure; but both their minds and consciences are defiled." The key in Paul's proverb is that in the second clause, he not only parallels pure with defiled, but he also adds the word "unbelieving." The key to being pure is faith in Christ, and the key to believing he has set his people free from self-made religion is faith in his name. We see this in Peter's dream in Acts 10 and in Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 4.

The Prescription for this Ministry

What, then, did Paul give as the prescription for this ministry to rebuke by Titus? He says, "They must"—and this is the language of necessity and urgency—"They must be silenced" (Titus 1:11). Paul says to Titus: "These false teachers are leading your people away from the Church and away from Christ; rebuke them; silence them now!"

How was Titus to do this? He was to rebuke them "sharply," that is, severely. He says in 2:15 that

**Paul says to Titus:
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Titus was to rebuke "with all authority." The authority of the minister is a ministerial authority that rests in the magisterial authority of Christ; nonetheless, it is authority. We see this when our Lord said, "All authority has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18), but then he sent his disciples out with the authority to teach and baptize. This power of "the office of the keys" comes from Christ himself.

And you notice a contrast here as well. The authority of the false teachers rested in "myths" and "commands of people," while Titus' authority rested in the Word of God: "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word . . . that he may be able . . . to rebuke" (Titus 1:9).

Paul's prescription for this ministry of rebuke speaks to us today. It means that ministers are not cheerleaders, CEO's, or counseling facilitators, but ministers of the authority of Christ. This also speaks a word of warning to those of us in the ministry: use the authority Christ has given you wisely and correctly. Do not abuse it! How can we do this? By speaking what God says in his Word and applying *that* Word, not in speaking beyond the bounds, not in riding the proverbial hobbyhorse, and certainly not in turning your church into a personality-driven club, where "the buck stops with you." You are a minister: speak with

power; you are a minister: speak with fear; you are a minister: speak with humility.

The Purpose of this Ministry

Finally, let me say a word about the purpose of this ministry of rebuke. Paul's purpose was clear. Rebuking the false teachers was that they would be "sound in the faith," on the one hand, and not devoted to the faith of men, on the other. Of course this rebuke would also serve to rebuke those who had fallen. What we learn is that rebuke is restorative, not retributive. Its intention is to humble those who have strayed that they might open their eyes to their plight and return to the Lord. Although we live in a day of political correctness and seeking not to offend anyone, we learn that we can speak difficult words to difficult people in the name of Christ, and restore them to his grace and the fellowship of this church.

Brothers, there are many problems in the church of Jesus Christ today, including in the Reformed churches. Theology and piety are being attacked on all sides. Like sheep our people are being attacked as by wolves. We see this no more

clearly than with the doctrine of justification. From all sides by the advocates of the ecumenical movement between Catholics and Evangelicals, by the proponents of the so-called "Federal Vision,"

and by the scholars of the New Perspectives on Paul, the heartbeat of the Reformation is being constricted. Rebuke them! Speak the truth in love, yes, but rebuke them nonetheless. Do it from the pulpit. Do it in the home Bible study. Do it in print. Do it in your church bulletin or newsletter. Do it on your church websites. By doing so, those who follow the commandments of men will be warned, and Lord willing, won.

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(Footnotes)

¹ http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/10/11/60minutes/main3358652_page2.shtml

HUMBLE WARFARE

by Howard Sloan

In chapters 10-12 of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul undertakes the task of defending his ministry and apostleship against the acts of the false teachers who have infiltrated the Corinthian church. These false teachers have taken it upon themselves to belittle Paul and his ministry to Corinthians while at the same time putting themselves over as "super-apostles." These insults, as well as are very clear in 2 Corinthians 11:2-6

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a

sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

He knows that what is at stake is not so much his ministry but the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why he engages in such a bold defense, and warns the Corinthians to do the same.

CHARACTER AND BOLDNESS

In 2 Corinthians 10:1-2 Paul says:

I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!— I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.

Paul's character and ministry are being called into question. How does Paul deal with such attacks? First, he appeals not to his own character, but to the character of Christ.

I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ

Paul appeals to the meekness of Christ. Meekness refers to enduring disgrace, maltreatment, and death at the hands of evil-doers. This is certainly was evident of our Lord as He ensured the scorn and mistreatment in the days of His trial before the human courts. Paul also mentions the gentleness of Christ. Gentleness is a term that denotes graciousness, leniency, and fairness. This is the same character that Paul desires of us as follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Col. 3:12

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

Paul quotes the words of his accusers in order to answer them saying: "I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!" Paul disputes the charge that he walks in a

worldly manner in verse 2, "I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh." Paul would rather not have to be bold with them, but he will be bold in Christ toward those who slander Christ in their slander of Paul. Paul of course realizes there is more here than just some petty jealousy. There is a spiritual battle going on. A battle in which the gospel hangs in the balance.

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete. (2 Cor. 10: 3-5)

CAPTIVES AND WARFARE

In verses 3 through 5 of 2 Corinthians 10 we read:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Paul admits that he still lives in the flesh, but to say that he lives of the flesh is something different entirely. Paul states that a Christian can not and must not live of the flesh because they are at war with it. The Christian is to arm themselves for this war against the flesh. What is it the Christian arms themselves with?

Ephes. 6:11-17

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

We arm ourselves with character weapons such as honesty, integrity, justice, holiness, and faithfulness. These weapons are absent from those who seek to do harm to the church and the gospel. We arm ourselves with spiritual weapons such as faith, the Word, the Spirit, and prayer. The world's weapons are devices of their own imagination and cunning. But we also must take up those weapons by opening our mouths to boldly proclaim the mystery of the gospel.

John Calvin observes that the believer “must learn to think of the Gospel as a fire at which the wrath of Satan is enkindled, and so he can not but arm himself to the fight whenever he sees an opportunity for advancing the Gospel.”¹

What do we have as missions in the war? Paul answers that in verse 4 to 6 of 2 Corinthians 10:

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought

captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, your obedience is complete.

Our first mission is to destroy strongholds – systems, schemes, structures and strategies that Satan designs to frustrate and obstruct the progress of the Gospel. Satan has so many strong holds in the church today because the church has been lulled to sleep. Now is the time to recognize and destroy the strongholds that Satan has set up against the gospel.

Our second mission is to destroy arguments and lofty “things” – Patterns, philosophies, theories, views, and tactics. The picture is of a wall or tower from which defenders discharge their ammo. This is Satan as sniper sitting aloft waiting to pick off the saints.

Figuratively speaking, this is any human theory raised up against the knowledge of the truth. The modern church has allowed human theory, philosophies, and tactics to replace or overshadow the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. It is no small wonder the shape than many churches find themselves in.

Third we lead thoughts captive – All theories are captured and brought into obedience to Christ. Is the way we think as the body of Christ in line with the principles and teachings of Scripture?

Finally, we punish disobedience.

What Paul has in mind in this last phrase is likely the idea of church discipline. The entire church must eradicate the false teaching of the intruders. This is Paul prime concern in dealing with these false teachers in Corinth. It is not because Paul's reputation is at stake, but because the gospel is at stake. Discipline must be done in order to preserve the power of the gospel and purity of the church.

CONCLUSIONS

So what must we do? We must enlist. No one fights in an army without first enlisting. We must check our hearts to see if we are members of God's army by

John Calvin observes that the believer “must learn to think of the Gospel as a fire at which the wrath of Satan is enkindled, and so he can not but arm himself to the fight whenever he sees an opportunity for advancing the Gospel.”¹

grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly we must train. We must familiarize ourselves with our weapons. We must learn the Word. We must know what we believe and why you believe it. This is the purpose of discipleship. Then we must take up arms and fight. We fight knowing that we fight not on our own strength but in the strength of the Lord.

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Coordinating Secretary of the Heidelberg Reformation Association. All Scripture references are from the Holy Bible: English Standard Version. Copyright 2001 Crossway Books unless otherwise noted.

(Footnotes)

¹ *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Calvin's Commentaries series, trans. T.A. Small (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) p. 129

Book Reviews

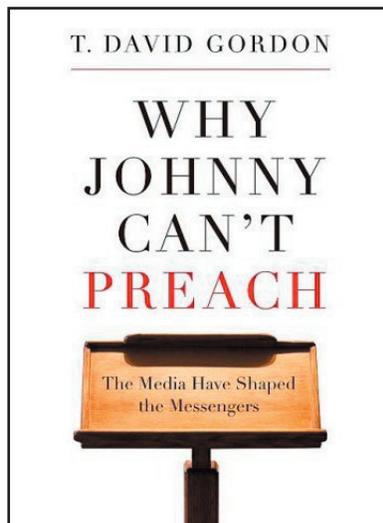
WHY JOHNNY CAN'T PREACH: THE MEDIA HAVE SHAPED THE MESSENGERS by T. David Gordon. 2009 P&R Publishing. Review by Jeremiah Montgomery.

Those familiar with the electioneering of former American President Bill Clinton will remember the primacy given to the economy in his bid for the presidency. His strategist, James Carville, knew that they could never beat a successful war-time president on issues such as global security or national defense. In order to win, their campaign would have to focus on something bigger – something more foundational to national defense than the military, something more paramount in the minds of the electorate than the war in Iraq. But what could be bigger than the Persian Gulf War? The economy, stupid.

The thesis of *Why Johnny Can't Preach* is that, apart from such minor problems such as ministerial laziness or congregational apathy, the primary problem with preaching today – the reason that only 30 percent of ministers can preach even an average sermon – is that ministers (and candidates for the ministry) are largely unable to read or to write. As a result, they are largely unable to preach.

What is the cause of such intellectual poverty? Gordon's answer is profound and simple: the dominant media culture has mangled our sensibilities. Television has shifted the basis of our media culture from

spoken and written language to images. The deep life of the mind has been supplanted by a stream of moving pictures. The results are threefold: we lose sensibility to the significant, we lose the patience necessary for good education, and we live our lives in a cloud of constant media noise. As a result, we have largely lost the ability to read texts closely – including (and especially) the Bible.



Additionally, the advent of the telephone has changed the way we communicate. Instant connectivity provides great benefits, but it also extracts a cost. In replacing face-to-face conversation with communication by proxy, telephone has wrought deleteriously on our ability to read people. In enabling spontaneous conversation, it has accustomed us to non-composed, un-premeditated modes of communication. The effect on preaching is predictably obvious: “Telephone conversations rarely have unity, order, or movement; it isn't surprising

that those who spend more time on the phone than in private written correspondence preach sermons that rarely have unity, order, or movement” (66).

The situation is admittedly grim, but is it hopeless? Gordon insists that it is not. Ministers and candidates for the ministry are still made in God's image, and can – if they will – crawl out of this quagmire. How? The final two chapters offer some suggestions. Firstly, the content of preaching must constantly resist the influence of media culture: refusing to reflect culture, it must instead and incessantly point people to the

redemption found in Christ. (Gordon's discussion on this subject is perhaps a bit anti-Puritan and anti-post-millennial, yet still quite good.) Secondly, the cultivation of preachers must become countercultural: those who would preach must self-consciously develop sensibilities for close reading, careful composition, and separating the significant from the trivial. Thirdly, the expectations of congregations must be adjusted: "preaching well requires more than preparing sermons; it requires preparing oneself as the kind of human who has the sensibilities prerequisite to preaching. An individual without time to read broadly and intensely, without time to reflect on life, without time

to compose (even if merely in a personal journal), is not likely to be an individual who can preach" (107).

Why Johnny Can't Preach is as incisive and insightful as it is slender. Its lessons are universally applicable: here is why we are so dumbed down, and here is what to do about it. In my judgment, it should be read by every pastor and should be required reading in every seminary homiletical curriculum. While not excusing the failures of individual ministers or writing off other factors, it points the finger at the true elephant in the pastor's study. Why can't Johnny preach? The media ecology has made him stupid.

News, Notes, and Prayer Requests

NEWS AND NOTES

- The theme of the August 2009 edition will be "Faith and Assurance." All articles are due by July 1, 2009.
- The HRA is looking to develop some seminars and workshops on what it means to be Reformed that can be held to help churches regain their Reformed heritage. If you would be interested in working on this project or in hosting a seminar or worship in your area, contact Rev. Sloan at pastorsloan@embarqmail.com
- The HRA is also interested in developing a DVD Bible study curriculum on the Heidelberg Catechism. Many churches are using this style of Bible Study material, but so few are producing any from a Reformed perspective. If you would be interest in participating in this project, contact

Rev. Sloan at pastorsloan@embarqmail.com.

- The Fall planning meeting will be held in October at St. Paul's Reformed Church in Bedford, PA. The exact date is yet to be determined.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- Pray for the planning of future conferences. We are considering different dates to allow more people to attend.
- Pray for continued growth in the HRA as well as increased interest in our work.
- Pray for direction as we seek to fulfill our purpose to reach out to churches who have lost their Reformed identity, as well as continue to be a resource for sound Reformed teaching and writing.

Editorial Policy for the Reformation Voice

1. The Executive Committee shall serve at the editorial committee for the Reformation Voice. They shall have the right to select or reject any content for inclusion in the Reformation Voice.
2. Content may be submitted by members, pending members, or members of member churches. The Executive Committee may also solicit the right to (re)print articles from other authors or reviewers whose writings may be of value to the membership of the HRA.

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