

not properly taught. The loss of the scriptural office of deacon (I Tim. 3:8-13; Acts 6; Phil. 1:1) is one example; unbiblical “committee men” are often substituted in their place. Without the robust doctrine of the church taught in the Word of God, elders can soon be reduced to mere figureheads or yes-men. Where the full, biblical and Reformed ecclesiology is not found, it is much easier for the minister to become the tyrannical lord of the congregation. Moreover, the members of the church will be ill equipped to contradict the usurpation that is the appointment and “rule” of women office-bearers (I Tim. 2:11-15). With little or no knowledge of the doctrine of the church, most people will blindly go along with lay preaching, contrary to the Reformed faith and confessions (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. & A. 158).

If sins or abuses arise in the congregation or denomination, the ill-taught member will not know if he or she can protest, or how to protest. Those bereft of Scripture’s wholesome ecclesiology are defenceless against strong-arm tactics by despotic office-bearers. All they are able to do is moan about it, because they are not empowered and equipped to use the God-honouring, ecclesiastical means for redress. Likewise, without the glorious, biblical doctrine of the church and its worship, congregations are wide open to modern “will worship” (Col. 2:23) and false ecumenism (II Chron. 19:2), despite the lamentations of those who retain some fear of God. What a foolish notion many have, that it is okay if ecclesiology gets short shrift in the preaching for it is of little practical value! Carnal men who think they know better than God are the occasion of the tears of the faithful and the apostasy of the church.

Once ignorance, apathy and errors regarding ecclesiology set in, it is usually very difficult to address and correct these problems by teaching. Tragically, many of the people begin to enjoy their increasingly man-centred church and its governance by man’s wisdom. As the prophet of God lamented, “My people love to have it so” (Jer. 5:31)!

Sadly, with the loss of vital ecclesiology and Christian knowledge in general, as well as the resulting waning of godliness, the biblical and creedal teaching of the Calvin Reformation is largely seen as too difficult and too costly. There are so few who are interested in the election of the church, the church militant, true doctrinal church unity, the holiness of the church, the regulative principle of church worship, covenant baptism, the office of deacon, elders overseeing the Lord’s supper, church discipline, church order, church government, Christ’s kingship over His church, spiritual church authority, the three marks of a church (faithful preaching, sacramental administration and church discipline), the necessity of joining a true church, etc. Sometimes the ignorance of ecclesiology is so deep and the people are so entrenched in false paths that they perversely slander the biblical, Reformed and creedal teaching as if it were Roman Catholicism! *Rev. Stewart*

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Pulpit Failure Regarding Ecclesiology

Through compromising with the ungodly world, liberal Protestantism has lost the infallible Scriptures, the blood of Christ’s cross, the gospel of grace, etc. Thus it is apostate and a manifestation of the false church. However, not all is well with evangelicalism either. One of its big problems is that of a low, sub-biblical and non-creedal view of the church. Why? How has this widespread malaise gotten hold?

A major reason is that of pulpit failure. Ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, has not been, and is not being, properly taught by many ministers (and their theological colleges). Why is this?

First, in some congregations, the “three Rs” are preached but little more or else. By the “three Rs,” we do not mean the traditional trio of reading, ’riting and ’rithmetic. Instead, we are referring to *ruin* by the fall, *redemption* by the cross and *regeneration* by the Spirit. While these things are indeed fundamental and massive biblical truths that are necessary for salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ, they are not the whole of God’s revelation. Often, ecclesiology and other things are totally or largely left out.

A second factor in pulpit failure regarding ecclesiology for some is that of the Sunday evening gospel service. Thereby at least half of the church’s sermons consist of the potted gospel addressed to the unconverted. This gives little preaching time to cover the truth of the church (and other biblical subjects) and so build up the people of God in this area. (Contact us, if you are in the British Isles and would like us to post to you a free copy of the pamphlet “Reformed Evangelism and the Sunday Evening Gospel Service.”)

A third reason why many ministers avoid or skate around the doctrine of the church is that they know that it is an issue on which many of their members disagree. In non-Reformed and non-creedal churches, there is an ever-increasing number of controversial topics. The temptation, and often the practice, is to steer clear of ecclesiology (and other subjects) out of the fear of upsetting and losing members. It is especially easy to understand the attraction of this for a minister of a small church: “If we lose any more people, our congregation will no longer be viable!”

However, this failure to teach ecclesiology (or any other biblical doctrine) is wrong. The apostolic example and requirement for the Christian pastor is that he declare—not a little or some or most of but—“*all* the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), as did Paul, that “wise masterbuilder” of the church (I Cor. 3:10)! An undershepherd who avoids or sells short God’s truth about His church is not feeding Christ’s sheep with the rich and varied diet of Jehovah’s inspired Word that is necessary for their spiritual health and strength.

Various practical problems especially arise in congregations where ecclesiology is

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The Law of Christ (1)

A reader asks, “I would like to ask your view of the law of Christ (I Cor. 9:20-21). What exactly is the law of Christ and how does it, if at all, differ from the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament?”

There is much confusion on this issue, especially in the controversy over the error of Antinomianism. There is a growing notion abroad, fanned by the Federal Vision, that the good works of the law have to be performed by the believer and added to faith in order to secure salvation. It is all part of a conditional salvation, which makes our salvation rest on our works. Those who deny conditional salvation are then slandered as hyper-Calvinists. The truth concerning God’s moral law plays an important part in the controversy but there are few who understand it properly, i.e., biblically.

The Decalogue was given to Israel from Mount Sinai. It is a codification of God’s law that is imbedded in the creation itself. According to Romans 1:18-32 and Romans 2:14-15, even the pagans, who do not have the sacred Scriptures, know the law in their consciences but God gave it to His people from Sinai on two tables of stone.

The Ten Commandments are, therefore, God’s unchangeable moral will for man whom He originally created in His own likeness. The Triune God formed every creature with the specific purpose of glorifying Him in its own unique way. Man was created to glorify God by living a holy life as He Himself is holy, and thus representing the Most High as head of the creation.

That man fell does not change the law in any respect, as the Arminian alleges. The keeping of the law is the fundamental way in which man must live as God’s friend-servant and that remains true for all time. Whether man can keep that law or not makes no difference. This is the *conditio sine qua non* for man to have fellowship with God. Even though man’s depravity is so complete that he cannot even will to do what God commands, he is still required to keep the law and violation of it means everlasting hell.

God is the infinitely holy One. He created man in His own image, which included holiness. If man (in Adam) refused to obey that law and fell into total depravity, this is not God’s fault but man’s own fault. That law remains unchangeably the same throughout history and into eternity. There is no difference between the law of the Old Testament and the New.

God had another purpose in mind in giving Israel His law from Sinai. God had eternally determined to save a church out of the fallen human race through His own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The law was given as a schoolmaster to lead Israel to Christ (Gal. 3:24). To fallen Adam and Eve, God promised the seed of the woman who would crush the head of Satan and deliver His people from the misery of sin and death (Gen. 3:15). Believing Israel lived in constant anticipation of the coming of that Deliverer.

But they often had to be taught to look for their Redeemer, even as we need to be taught the same as we await our Lord’s second coming. One means was the law, which, as Paul expresses it, was a schoolmaster to bring the people to Christ.

It worked this way. God had, in His saving grace, so worked in the hearts of His people that they heard and learned that salvation included a keeping of the law. “Do this,” God had said, “and live.” But believing Israel, hearing this, could only cry out in anguish, “We can’t, we can’t.” And the law said, “Cursed is he that keepeth not all the words of this law” (cf. Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10). It was to them that the gospel came: “Look to Him who is to come. Hope in the promise of God who will send the Redeemer!”

The words of our Lord must have come as refreshing water to the thirsty soul, when He cried to those who were labouring and heavily laden with the curses of the law crushing them, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). “You do not have to keep the law in order to become God’s people. I have come to do what you cannot do!”

The law still has that purpose today, as our beloved *Heidelberg Catechism* has it: “Whence knowest thou thy misery? Out of the law of God” (Q. & A. 3).

The law says, “Keep me and live, and accursed art thou if thou keepest me not.” All I can say is, “I can’t, I can’t. Woe is me.” It is the gospel that comes with good news: “Go to Christ, go to Him. In Christ and His work, not yours, is hope to be found.”

When I go to church, it is after a week of toil in which I have sinned. The burden of sin weighs heavily on my soul. I do not come to church, in the first place, to hear the minister say to me, “You must do this; this is your calling. I admonish you that you must fulfil this command to come to God.” My only response is, “I tried. I can’t. Is it all hopeless?” I go to church to hear what Christ did for me! That is the gospel! That is what I want to hear! That is what I need!

But there is more. Christ not only paid the necessary cost of eternal hell for us but He also earned for us the fullness of salvation, now and eternally in heaven. While this includes all the blessings of salvation, I want to call your attention to one in particular.

After a description of Israel’s terrible sins in Ezekiel 16, God speaks of His covenant promise in verses 60-63. God says that His anger towards us for breaking His law is pacified (63). Besides this covenant blessing of the forgiveness of sins, there is another blessing of the new covenant: God’s writing His law in our hearts.

Hebrews 8:8-10, quoting Jeremiah 31:31-33, says, “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel ... Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers ... For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.”

It is the same law given to Adam at his creation and codified for Israel at Sinai that is now written in our minds and on our hearts. That is, salvation by Christ has as one of its wonderful blessings the spiritual ability to keep God’s law (though never perfectly in this life).

By His irresistible grace in the new covenant, God has written on our hearts the law of love, love for Him and our neighbour, as summed in the Decalogue of Moses. For us, the Ten Commandments have become the law of Christ!

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