
POSITIONS

SALT OF THE EARTH

TITO S. LYRO

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” (Matthew 5:13)

On my way to the 1988 National Student Championships in São Luiz do Maranhão (Brazil), the bus that our team was traveling broke down. We were in the middle of nowhere. It was a very arid area and there weren't very many cars going by. The coaches (the particular bus I was riding was taking the swimming and track and field teams) decided that the best thing to do would be to push the bus till we found a gas station. So, we spent the next two or three hours pushing the bus. We took turns between teams. We would work hard uphill and coast downhill. We finally arrived at a little village on the side of the road. You have to keep in mind that we were in the middle of the poorest region of a third world country. There wasn't very much in the little village. After pushing a full size bus for so long we were all very hungry. So, we asked the villagers where the restaurant was. They pointed us to a tent and said that we would find something to eat there. The “waiter” showed us to our table (one and only long table with one bench on each side of the table). There was no menu because they only had one dish: carne de sol. Carne de sol is a traditional way of preparing meat consisting of saturating the meat with salt and then hanging it on a clothesline to “soak

up” the sun (thus the name carne de sol, or sun meat). When salted, meat can last for a long time without having to be refrigerated, which is ideal for the remote, poor villages of northeastern Brazil. Back 1988, all I was thinking about was how hungry I was and how good that carne de sol tasted. Today as I look back at the salted meat hanging on the clothesline under the midday sun, our Lord's statement about being the salt of the earth becomes much more vivid to me.

In Matthew 5:13, the Lord Jesus Christ is describing the function of every member of the kingdom of God. We are to preserve the earth. We are to keep it from becoming completely putrid. We are to do that even under the most adverse situation just as the salt that was in that meat preserved it even under the midday sun of equatorial Brazil. Salting the earth is not the individual Christian's job only but also the job of the Church as a whole. To the Church were given the keys of the kingdom in the proclamation of the gospel and the duty to occupy this earth till our Lord Jesus Christ comes back. The Bible Presbyterian Church has taken this calling very seriously as evidenced by its interaction with the broader culture. I did not find any place where it explicitly stated that one of the objectives of the Bible Presbyterian Church was to impact and redeem culture. To tell you the truth, the Bible Presbyterian Church's biblical position of ecclesiastical separation is perceived by outsiders as an excuse to abandon the cultural environment that we live in as belonging to the Devil.¹ As matter of fact, even yesterday somebody joked about my turning in a blank page

for this article because, according to this person, the Bible Presbyterian Church hasn't done much to redeem culture. However, even a cursory examination of the history of our denomination demonstrates that in practice the Bible Presbyterian Church has salted the earth and continues to do so.

The Bible Presbyterian Church from its inception has had an evangelistic zeal. Our BP forefathers took the Great Commission very seriously. Missions at home and abroad have been a priority in the history of our denomination. What better way to redeem our culture and impact it for the Lord than to fervently present the redeeming Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ to the masses? Throughout its history the Bible Presbyterian Church has done that. For the first 46 years through the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions and more recently also through the Presbyterian Missionary Union, missionaries have been sent to the far corners of the world and of this nation to proclaim the only message that can redeem culture by redeeming the basic unit of culture: the individual. Within the last two years, new efforts have been made on the part of the Presbyterian Missionary Union to reach cultures that cannot be reached by traditional missionary efforts. PMU created the Venture Guild International, which will bring Christian professionals into countries that would be otherwise closed to the gospel. Is this going to impact the culture of those countries? Of course it will. The Bible Presbyterian Church, through these two approved agencies, has salted the world.

Besides missions, the Bible Presbyterian Church has sought to interact with culture through its educational agencies.

Shelton and Highland Colleges were set up not only to train men for the gospel ministry, but also to educate Christian men and women to be responsible members of society at large. This desire to prepare men and women for a life of service was evident in Shelton's motto "Training Christian warriors." Shelton College succeeded in preparing warriors to fight for the testimony of Jesus Christ. While preparing to write this article, I searched the World Wide Web to see if I could find one or two things about Shelton College. I was pleasantly surprised when my search returned hundreds of hits! Shelton graduates are serving as pastors, seminary teachers, elementary, middle, and high school teachers, doctors, lawyers, local leaders, fathers, mothers, etc. Highland College also has helped salt the earth although on a smaller scale. How many of our Bible Presbyterian ministers have had Dr. John Battle or Dr. Howard Carlson for a teacher? They are both graduates of Highland College. Thus, as we endeavor to salt the earth in our ministries, Highland College is indirectly working through us. The Bible Presbyterian Church has also salted the earth through its approved seminaries. In the beginning through Faith Theological Seminary and now through Western Reformed Seminary and Cohen University and Theological Seminary, the Bible Presbyterian Church has sought to train its ministers and lay leaders according to the highest standards of biblical scholarship.

Perhaps the most well documented area in which the Bible Presbyterian Church impacted culture is the area of politics. In preparing for writing this article I read countless issues of the Christian Beacon from the 1960's and 70's. Issue after issue related the political activ-

ism of the leaders of the Bible Presbyterian Church. From rallies in Washington, D. C. to summoning then Senator John Kennedy to appear before the executive committee of the American Council of Christian Churches, the Christian Beacon presents a picture of a denomination that was intrinsically involved with the political affairs of this nation. A particular issue caught my eyes because it had been in the news recently. On issue # 16, volume 24, published on Thursday, May 28, 1959, the Christian Beacon denounced the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan as a KGB agent. At the time of publication, the article did not seem to have been taken seriously. However, in 1999 a 1074-page book was published in Germany proving that the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan was indeed a KGB agent. The BP leadership was not only attempting to influence culture, but it was doing it in a way that was ahead of its time.

but also the ecclesiastical culture. In 1941, Dr. Carl McIntire together with Dr. Robert Ketcham were very instrumental in founding of the American Council of Christian Churches. The ACCC was founded to promote biblical Christianity and to stand in opposition to the National Council of Churches. The Bible Presbyterian Church was also a vital part in founding the International Council of Christian Churches in 1948. For years the ICCA contended for the faith once delivered to the saints all over the world. In addition to its role in the founding of the American and International Councils of Christian Churches, the Bible Presbyterian Church has sought to impact the ecclesiastical culture through yearly resolutions approved at its stated synod meetings. From Bible translation to ordination of homosexuals, the Bible Presbyterian synods throughout the years have dealt with these issues in a biblical and God honoring way.²

The Bible Presbyterian Church has a rich history. Sometimes we get so caught up in the problems that we have had as a denomination that we forget the good things we have done.

The Bible Presbyterian Church has not only impacted the “secular” culture,
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Another way that the Bible Presbyterian Church has endeavored to redeem our culture is through its publications. In the late 1980’s Fundamental Presbyterian Publications was founded to publish works of Bible Presbyterian men or works of interest to the Bible Presbyterian Church and the Church in general. Throughout its almost two decade history FPP has brought to our attention issues that other publishing houses haven’t. They also have encouraged our Bible Presbyterian youth to write essays on very important topics through its yearly youth essay contest. Nevertheless our rich publishing tradition goes further back than the founding of FPP. For years, the Christian Beacon was the periodical of choice among Bible-believing Christians. One could find editorials and reports on every

major issue in the land. In addition to that, Dr. Carl McIntire wrote and published several books such as *The Death of a Church*, in which he recounts the struggles of the Presbyterian Church with apostasy. In more recent years Sharon Backus has written and published invaluable books in the area of nouthetic counseling such as *Running the Christian Race*. This book is a great help for parents whose children have been labeled ADD/ADHD. Through these publications, and others like them, the Bible Presbyterian Church has salted our culture.

Besides the efforts of the denomination as a whole, individual Bible Presbyterian churches and ministers have sought to impact their communities. For example, 32 years ago the Tacoma Bible Presbyterian Church established a kindergarten through 8th grade school with the express purpose of leading children to Christ and raising responsible citizens. In its 32 years of history, Heritage Christian School has educated close to 500 students, who have gone out and impacted their sphere of influence. Or, we could consider the counseling ministry of the Grand Island Bible Presbyterian Church, where for eight hours on Tuesdays³ Dr. Kevin Backus, Rev. Mark Turner, and others dedicate their time to help the church family and the community at large. We could also mention Reverend Paul Durand's book ministry. For years now Rev. Durand has faithfully managed The Truth & Grace Resource Services where we can find great books on Reformed theology, home schooling, history, biographies, etc. Through his recommended reading list Rev. Durand is impacting our culture and salting it. In the Northwest Presbytery, Rev. James Huff diligently keeps our churches aware of political and religious

issues that we must pay attention to. He doesn't have to do that, yet he faithfully informs us so that we, in turn, can exercise our citizen duties and salt our communities. These are but a few examples of what individuals have been doing in the Bible Presbyterian Church to impact the community they are in.

The Bible Presbyterian Church has a rich history. Sometimes we get so caught up in the problems that we have had as a denomination that we forget the good things we have done. Dr. Howard Carlson preached a sermon at the 54th General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church convened at Grace Bible Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio and in that sermon he said the following:

Why Bible Presbyterian? Our history has shown us the way, both good and bad. Our exemplary centrality and vigor have shown us that we have what is needed for the future. Our size is strength in the sense that we have little to drag with us into the future.⁴

When I look back at our history, I see a church that has had its fair share of struggles. However, I also see a denomination that has been actively interacting with culture and endeavoring to redeem it. Dr. Carlson also said,

Our Fathers were very wise in the direction they gave to our Church. They placed our agenda in the very forefront of the day's controversies. To illustrate; on the new property of the Suncoast BP church there is a swimming pool. One of the pool tools left by the previous owners was an automatic pool vacuum cleaner. This particular model has a nasty habit of mov-

ing into a corner of the pool bottom and running in circles. That corner gets clean, but the rest of the pool remains dirty. Many denominations approach truth and society in a similar manner – in a corner. Our Church fathers sought, biblically, to clean up the whole “pool” of church and society and not just a corner. We have been an activist group, vocal and involved in the central controversies of the day. Was that wise? Was it biblical? Would a future similar course justify a positive answer to the question of the evening, “Why BPs?” Can BPs be a blessing to the entire nation and church? Will the next generation of our church be content in the comfort of cleaning just a corner?⁵

May the Lord enable our denomination to continue to clean all the corners of this earthly pool. 📖

¹ If this perception is based on the fact that the Bible Presbyterian Church has refused to rub shoulders with unbelief and has called Christians to live godly lives, then it is a true perception. However, this is something to be proud of. We cannot salt the earth by being just like the world.

² For Bible Presbyterian resolutions go to <http://bpc.org/synod/resolutions/index.html>

³ The counseling ministry continues all week, but all recurring appointments are scheduled for Tuesdays.

⁴ Carlson, Howard. Why Bible Presbyterian. Cincinnati, OH: 1990. <http://www.bpc.org/who/whybpc.html>

⁵ Ibid.

THE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN POSITION ON ECCLESIASTICAL SEPARATION

GARY G. COHEN

For all its almost seventy-year history the Bible Presbyterian Church has been best known nationally and internationally as consistently standing for ecclesiastical separation. The Bible Presbyterian Church has a testimony over the last two thirds of the twentieth century for separation away from those who deny the tenets of the historic Christian faith, and from those groups who, while they may be sound themselves, befriend the deniers of the faith—commonly labeled as “neo-evangelicals.”

Here we are speaking of “ecclesiastical” not “personal” separation. That is, we are dealing with church alliances and support, not with an individual Christian’s personal separation from the things of the world. Ecclesiastical separation consists of a believer or an organized church not joining or helping an apostate church; or, if he or she is in one, they are to come out of it. This also implies that believing churches and organizations will not join, remain in, or assist denominations or groups who are not true to the Christ of the Bible. Jude exhorts us,

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

Thus, we must not only stay out of the apostate groups ourselves, but Jude

declares that we also have a duty to testify (“earnestly contend”) against them. Here too, the Bible Presbyterian Church has not only separated from the ungodly, but it has had a testimony over the years, of giving a militant warning to the Christians to “come out from among them” (2 Cor 6:17).

THE HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF THE 20TH CENTURY REFORMATION

THE HISTORIC GENESIS—THE BRIGGS ADDRESS

Bible Presbyterian seminary students are usually well familiar with the details of the Briggs Trial. The original Bible Presbyterians were members chiefly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (PCUSA) at the turn of the previous century. On January 20, 1891, Charles A. Briggs was to give an “inaugural address” to the supporters of Union Theological Seminary of New York City, which was then in the PCUSA, and which in fact vied with Princeton Seminary in nearby New Jersey to be the denomination’s premium elite theological institution. Briggs, himself also a minister of the PCUSA, was being elevated to a tenured position as Professor of Biblical Theology. Instead of the expected inspiring, possibly tedious tome on some lesser point of religion, Briggs gave an address akin to Martin Luther’s nailing the Ninety-five Theses on Wittenburg’s door—except his was in the opposite direction. He shocked the assembled crowd, by canon shot after canon shot, questioning and challenging the historic Christian faith. He summarily stated that the church and reason were foundations of truth, equal with the Scriptures. He declared that many Old Testament prophecies had not come true, nor could

they be fulfilled. He questioned the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and the one-Isaiah authorship of that book, and spoke of a second chance for salvation, and suggested that sanctification was not complete at the death of a believer!

It was a theological explosion! For the next fifty years it locked that denomination and the entire Christian church, especially in America, in what became known as “The Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy,” which lasted until 1941, when the bombing of Pearl Harbor eclipsed it. The Briggs address, and his very willingness to give it at the start of a new professorial position, showed the thinking of Union Theological Seminary, its professors, and its leadership. The seminary was already corrupted! Briggs was subsequently put on ecclesiastical trial before the Presbytery of New York (filled with friends from Union Seminary), which in January 1893 cleared him as “misunderstood.” The General Assembly of the PCUSA thereupon reversed the decision of the New York Presbytery, and in June 1893 suspended and defrocked Briggs. Union Seminary promptly declared its independence from the denomination—but yet its theologically liberal faculty members remained in the denomination to help steer it toward a vastly more liberal position.

THE FIVE FUNDAMENTALS

By 1910 five items had become the focus and canon of theological controversy. These surfaced when three men were licensed by the New York Presbytery; they stated concerning the virgin birth of Christ, “We do not deny it, but we are not prepared to affirm it as we would certain other doctrines.” The five issues became:

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- The inerrancy of the Scriptures;
- The virgin birth of Christ;
- The substitutionary atonement (that Christ died as the substitute for believers);
- The bodily resurrection of Christ;
- The reality of the miracles of Christ's ministry

These became known as the “Five Fundamentals,” and gave rise to the appellation, “Fundamentalists,” to those who supported them. The idea was that these are the rock bottom foundational understandings of the Christian faith that are necessary to be held by its church leaders, its ministers. There were and are other important doctrines, such as the deity of Christ, but these did not become the focus of disagreement. Liberals affirmed the deity of Christ; however, many defined the term so as to actually deny its historic and biblical meaning. Nevertheless, it was these five items that became the battlefield.

Then in that same year, 1910, the General Assembly of the PCUSA voted that every minister must “affirm” these five doctrines. This was also to counter a ploy of some, who were saying, “We do not deny, nor affirm them.”

Again in 1916 these five “Fundamentals” were again affirmed by the General Assembly, and then in 1923 this was repeated. Meanwhile the controversy had spread throughout America, and around the world within foreign missions organizations. Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopalian, and countless other groups and denominations were debating within themselves, in a spreading theological civil war.

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THE AUBURN AFFIRMATION

In 1924, after the 1923 General Assembly had again passed a resolution that belief in the “Five Fundamentals” was essential to being a minister in the PCUSA, Robert Hastings Nichols, Professor at Auburn Seminary, New York, drew up a protest paper that became known as, “The Auburn Affirmation.” It “affirmed” (1) that the General Assembly did not have constitutional authority to bind its ministers to these five points, and (2) that there were other acceptable theories that could be maintained by ministers on each of the five items.

This affirmation was brought before the General Assembly of 1924, and, shockingly, it passed! The fundamentalist majority had waned, with 457 votes yes, 351 no, and 147 abstaining. With the majority having shifted, and the fundamentalists having not cleaned house when they had the majority, the liberal theologians (and those who went along with their denials for the sake of keeping peace in the church) now had the majority. The majority had shifted—that church denomination could no longer, humanly speaking, be salvaged.

EVENTS OF THE 1930S

1930.—As a reaction to the snatching of Princeton Seminary out of conservative hands by a board reorganization of that school in 1929, Westminster Seminary was founded as a haven to train PCUSA ministerial candidates in the historic biblical Christian faith.

1931.—The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM) was formed so that conservative Bible believing churches could (1) send out sound-in-the-faith missionaries, and (2)

could send their money to a sound missionary board—versus the PCUSA’s denominational board, which was embroiled in a plurality of controversies over what their missionaries did not believe and could not affirm, their missions moving more and more to taking the social gospel and westernization to the foreign field.

1934.—The PCUSA General Assembly, now with a liberal-and-friends majority, issued a mandate to the IBPFM to disband, as violating the peace and unity of the church.

1935.—The board members of the IBPFM were put on ecclesiastical trial by the General Assembly. Prominent among them were Dr. J. Gresham Machen, then of Princeton Seminary, and Dr. Carl McIntire, pastor in Collingswood, NJ, who would emerge in future years as the dynamic leader of the fundamentalist world, and who would serve for many years as the moderator of the new Bible Presbyterian Church (to be formed in 1937). In March, 1935, before standing trial before the Judicial Commission of the PCUSA, Machen declared at the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania:

My profession of faith is simply that I know nothing of the Christ proclaimed, through the Auburn Affirmation, by the Moderator of that Commission. I know nothing of a Christ who is presented to us in a human book containing errors, but know only a Christ presented in a divine Book, the Bible, which is true from beginning to end. I know nothing of a Christ who possibly was and possibly was not born of a virgin, but only a Christ who was truly conceived by the Holy

Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. (pamphlet; Philadelphia: IBPFM, n.d.)

1936.—The PCUSA General Assembly affirmed the findings of the Judicial Commission and suspended Machen, McIntire, and the other members of the IBPFM. Thus 43 years after the General Assembly had suspended Briggs for denying essentials of the faith, now those upholding that faith were being suspended!

1936.—The Presbyterian Church of America, from which the Bible Presbyterian Church came, was formed out of the clear realization that the PCUSA can no longer be reformed from within. Dr. McIntire called over the radio for a “20th Century Reformation,” which would call people to separate out of denominations and groups that deny the historic Christian faith and the Christ of the Bible and which would unite “fundamentalists” into a new resurgence of faith, apart from the apostasy.

The Lord took Machen home in January, 1937. Without his unifying hand at Westminster Seminary, disagreements over the direction that seminary was to go, especially with regard to (a) the millennial question and (b) Christian liberty, surfaced. Faith Seminary was thusly formed by Dr. Carl McIntire, Dr. Alan A. MacRae, Dr. Jack Murray, and others who desired a sound school to train up faithful leaders which would be uniquely reformed, premillennial, and which would take the stand of abstinence on the alcohol question. (Recall the crime wave that crossed the USA from 1920 to 1933, the Prohibition Era, between passage of the 18th Amendment and its repeal by the 21st.)

The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, launching the USA into World War II, eclipsed church struggles, and turned the direction of countless congregations to praying for our soldiers fighting in Europe and in the Pacific. The American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) was, nevertheless, formed in 1941, and the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) in 1948, much under the leadership of Dr. Carl McIntire. These councils were to provide a separatist unity plus to combat the World Council of Churches of Christ (WCCC), also formed in 1948. By 1950 out of the old liberal Federal Council of Churches (FCC), 1908, an equally liberal National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC), came into being.

THE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN STANCE ON BIBLICAL SEPARATION

As we attempt to teach the principles of biblical separation to our congregations and students today, over a century after the Briggs trial, we find that many American churchgoers are totally unaware of theological liberalism, past or present. Others are concerned with personal happiness and life fulfillment. The Bible, however, from end to end, demands that in every generation we also practice ecclesiastical separation, and the penalty for not doing so is the gradual lowering of the cross of Christ and melting into a general religiosity which is neither biblical nor has the power to save (Rom 1:16).

ECCLESIASTICAL SEPARATION DEFINED

Ecclesiastical Separation is simply that believers are not to join or help an apostate church, or if in one, they are to come out of it. This also implies that faithful churches and organizations will not

join nor remain in denominations or groups that are not true to the Christ of the Bible, nor will they assist them. They are to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

While the Scriptures encourage unity among believers in Christ, they also declare that there is a distinction, and has been a distinction in every age, between God’s people and those who are not. Thus in the Old Testament there is a difference made between the clean and the unclean, the holy and the unholy, the true Israel and those outside. Likewise the New Testament clearly delineates a line between the true church of Christ and unbelievers. Although the exact membership of the invisible church is known only to God, the earthly visible Church has been given the duty of having a visibly pure testimony by not permitting open heretics, apostates, and those openly living contrary to Scripture to share its fellowship and membership (1 Cor 5:1-13).

In light of this, ecclesiastical separation can be defined as the purposeful action of an individual Christian, a local church, or an entire denomination to seek the purity and holiness of testimony and membership commanded by Scripture, and in pursuing this holiness to not give any visibly apostate person or group approval, fellowship, cooperation, or membership.

This means that we do not take those that are known to be outside of the covenant of Christ into our churches as members or participants, and that we also ourselves depart from and come out of churches and organizations that are apostate, i.e., heretical or unbelieving, or who

advocate or participate in that which is contrary to Scriptural teaching. This is done for the purposes of both upholding true righteousness and giving an external testimony to those within and without. Such a testimony of separation is made for these reasons:

- It is biblically commanded (1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; Jude 3; Rev 18:4).
- It is demanded by righteousness.
- It gives a testimony to both those within and without the Church.
- It is part of the biblical instrumentality to call erring ones to repentance.
- It provides a lifeline for those within an erring body to “come out from among them” (2 Cor 6:17).

In the performance of ecclesiastical separation, the question of *secondary separation* has caused much debate. Let it here be said, as part of the definition of separation, that it is often necessary for testimony’s sake for a church body not only to separate from a group which is involved in some type of heresy or evil, but also to distance itself from other parties who, while not holding the heresy or evil itself, nevertheless countenance, support, and fellowship with the erring group. *That is, we separate ourselves from evil doers and their friends.* For example, Samson needed to stay away from not only the Philistines, but also from the friends of the Philistines.

OLD TESTAMENT TESTIMONY TO ECCLESIASTICAL SEPARATION

Scripture makes it clear, going back to the Old Testament, that Moses withdrew his approval and cooperation from

the Egyptian government and state church in a courageous testimony (a) against idolatry; (b) to the existence of the true God; and (c) against the slavery system of that government and state church. Thus the writer of Hebrews declares that Moses chose

rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. (Heb 11:24-27)

Likewise, during the period of the Divided Kingdom, when the generally righteous King Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, in 850 B.C. united with wicked King Ahab of Israel, to fight against the wicked King of Syria at Ramoth Gilead, the prophet Jehu declared in a stinging rebuke, “Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD” (2 Chr 19:2). The point was that God’s people must not unite with the wicked, even in a seemingly good cause.

NEW TESTAMENT TESTIMONY TO ECCLESIASTICAL SEPARATION

The Apostle Paul sums it up with the resounding and clear three commands in 2 Corinthians 6:14,17,

**The Bible, from end to end,
demands that in every
generation we practice
ecclesiastical separation.**

- “Be not unequally yoked!” (If you are not already joined, don’t go in.)
- “Come out from among them!” (If you are already in, then come out now.)
- “Touch not the unclean thing!” (Then once you are out, stay completely away.)

Then God adds the beautiful promise for those who will obey, namely, “And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor 6:17,18). So however great is the loss suffered by coming out in obedience—be it friendships, career, or finance—God promises to receive us when we obey and to take care of us as our Heavenly Father. There are many more NT passages that teach this, such as Jude 3; Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 2:6, 14-15; 18:4.

CHURCH HISTORY’S TESTIMONY TO ECCLESIASTICAL SEPARATION

The history of the historic Christian church over two thousand years is replete with examples of those who “came out from among them,” that is, who left errant ecclesiastical groups at great personal sacrifice to be true to Christ. They practiced biblically commanded ecclesiastical separation, i.e., “with such a one, no not to eat” (1 Cor 5:11). Of these faithful heroes for Christ in church history, who for obedience sake refused to remain in nor to give allegiance to apostate church systems and leaders, we cite the Book of Hebrews, as it did of the Old Testament worthies, and declares that this world was not worthy of them (Hebrews 11:35-38).

Thus Luther in 1517, when he publicly nailed the 95 Theses to the door of

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the Church at Wittenberg, was practicing ecclesiastical separation. He put a clear line between himself and the open error of a visible church that taught heresy. The church and its Pope Leo X taught that the giving of a contribution to the building fund of St. Peter’s (masked as buying an indulgence) could secure pardon for sin. Luther could have gone along with this error and had a comfortable life, but he chose to obey the scriptural command to, “Come out from among them,” and then in 1521 at the Diet of Worms, before Charles V and the Holy Roman Empire, he declared, “Here I stand, I can do no other; God help me.”

THE BILLY GRAHAM ISSUE

It must also be noted that the leaders and ministers of the Bible Presbyterian Church have throughout the last half of the 20th Century uniformly spoken out against the inclusivism seen in the Billy Graham Evangelistic Crusades, which disappointingly often asked known and outspoken liberal apostate ministers to lead in prayer at the rallies. This was especially trying because Rev. Graham comes forth as one who loves God and who loves the Bible. But, however, just as a beautiful David could sin, so also when Rev. Graham errs, we must still be true to God’s Word. In line with this, these meetings also regularly not only failed to warn newly professed converts to begin to attend only biblically sound churches, but in many cases even directed “decision cards” to apostate churches. This issue caused a rift in the evangelical community, and soon Bible Presbyterians, who believed firmly that “the Lord’s work should be done the Lord’s way,” found themselves forced by the dictates of Scripture and conscience to also testify against those seemingly sound and orthodox

churches and groups which did in fact support the Graham rallies, knowing that apostates participated by invitation and often on the platform. This secondary separation issue was again basically saying that, "We cannot support doing the Lord's work in a disobedient manner, and we cannot fellowship either with those who do this nor with those otherwise sound churches who support or befriend them.

Let us be ever mindful that when the cause is the Lord's and the issue is clear, let us first pray and testify, and then when necessary, courageously obey the biblical commands for ecclesiastical separation, and "Come out from among them, and be ye separate . . ." (2 Cor 6:17), and let us testify of this scriptural obligation to others.

Thus to every generation comes the cry in the book of Revelation, speaking of God's people coming out of the end-time Babylon system and it applies today to all who are members of or supporting or encouraging false systems, apostate liberal denominations, or ecclesiastical groups that deny the Lord: "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev 18:4).

Thus ecclesiastical separation, which is truly a biblically commanded separation, has been part of the heritage of the Bible Presbyterian Church. 

ESCHATOLOGY IN THE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

JOHN A. BATTLE

One of the distinguishing features of the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) has been its adoption and promotion of premillennial eschatology. Most Presbyterian denominations accept the original form of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Westminster Larger Catechism; these present a general resurrection of the dead (agreeable particularly to amillennialism or postmillennialism). Some subscribe to an amended form, which is worded so as to allow all three main views of eschatology (amillennialism, postmillennialism, or premillennialism). However, the BPC at its first Synod in 1938 amended the Westminster standards to present the premillennial view exclusively.

This adoption by the BPC of the premillennial position was the consequence of the historical situation at the church's founding. Subsequently, the church has had to take this position into account in its own policies and ministry. The BPC has held to the premillennial position with varying amounts of strictness. Throughout its history the BPC has experienced the tension between its stated premillennial position and its desire to be a church that welcomes all Bible-believing Presbyterian churches and ministers into its communion.

SOME DEFINITIONS

Here are some brief and simple definitions of terms used in eschatological

discussions. There are three main views relating the second coming of Christ to the promised glorious kingdom:

- *Premillennialism*.—At Jesus' second coming the redeemed dead will be resurrected; then there will be a glorious 1000-year kingdom, followed by the resurrection of the rest of the dead and the final judgment.
- *Amillennialism*.—The biblical promises of the glorious 1000-year kingdom are spiritual in nature, and refer to the present age, either the church on earth or the redeemed in heaven. At Jesus' second coming all the dead will be raised in a general resurrection for the final judgment.
- *Postmillennialism*.—The glorious 1000-year kingdom will take place in the future, through the work of the Holy Spirit and the church. Jesus will return after the 1000 years are over, and there will be the general resurrection and judgment of all the dead at that time.

There are also three main views that relate the rapture of the living believers and the resurrection of the righteous dead to the predicted "great tribulation":

- *Pretribulationism*.—This rapture and resurrection will take place in an invisible second coming before a final seven-year tribulation period. Jesus then will return to earth visibly, at the end of that period. Variations of this view are the *midtribulation* view (the rapture and resurrec-

tion of the just will be half way through the seven-year period, with the "great tribulation" of 3½ years following) and the "*pre-wrath*" view (the rapture and resurrection of the just will take place after the beginning of the tribulation period, but before the period of God's outpoured wrath, closer to the end of the period; this view approaches the posttribulation view).

- *Posttribulationism*.—This rapture and resurrection will take place after a final tribulation period, at the same time that Jesus returns to earth visibly. When combined with premillennialism, this view is often called *historic premillennialism*.
- *Preteritism*.—The predicted "great tribulation" has already occurred, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. There is no expected future tribulation period prior to Jesus' second coming.

There are two primary theological systems that have an impact on one's view of eschatology:

- *Dispensationalism*.—God has divided history and people into major divisions, with different plans and purposes for each group. This is especially true for Israel and the church, which are two distinct groups, with distinct promises and eschatological programs. Nearly all dispensationalists are premillennial and pretribulationist.
- *Covenant theology*.—God operates through one overarching

covenant of grace, which remains constant throughout the various historical dispensations. Israel and the church share the same promises and eschatological program.

Within all these views listed there are variations, and all of them have been held in various degrees by Presbyterian theologians.

THE PRECURSOR TO THE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

J. Gresham Machen was the most prominent conservative Presbyterian leader in the great modernist-fundamentalist struggle within the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (PCUSA).¹ In 1929 he led in the formation of Westminster Theological Seminary near Philadelphia. This seminary produced graduates who were strong supporters of the inerrancy of the Bible and other fundamental Christian doctrines, and who sought to be ordained in the PCUSA. However, some presbyteries of the PCUSA were reluctant to accept Westminster graduates. Later, Westminster became the primary seminary supplying ministers to the new separatist Presbyterian churches.

Throughout its history the BPC has experienced the tension between its stated premillennial position and its desire to be a church that welcomes all Bible-believing Presbyterian churches and ministers into its communion.

In 1933 Machen led in the formation of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM), designed to enable Presbyterians to support doctrinally sound missionaries. The PCUSA reacted with its Mandate of 1934, a declaration demanding that all Presbyterians who belonged to the IBPFM immediately resign from that board and support the official boards of the church. Many obeyed the Mandate and resigned; however, Machen refused to obey the Mandate. Others who stood with him at that time and endured church trials included J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., Harold S. Laird, Charles J. Woodbridge, Paul Wooley, Roy Talmage Brumbaugh, H. McAllister Griffiths, Merrill T. MacPherson, Edwin H. Rian, and Carl McIntire.

In 1935 Machen and others formed the Presbyterian Constitutional Covenant Union (PCCU), pledging to devote themselves to a reformation of the PCUSA, and, failing that, to separate from it and to form a new church that was faithful to Scripture and the constitutional principles of the PCUSA. At that time Machen inaugurated the *Presbyterian Guardian*, a paper devoted to promoting the cause of the PCCU. When Machen and others refused to obey the mandate, they were put on trial and effectively put out of the PCUSA. On June 11, 1936, they met together and, as they had pledged, dissolved the PCCU and formed a new denomination, the Presbyterian Church of America (PC of A; not to be confused with the modern denomination, the PCA—Presbyterian Church in America). Unfortunately, Machen died of pneumonia only about six months later, January 1, 1937. His strong leadership had been able to hold the new church together and

set it on its course. Soon thereafter the PCUSA sued the PC of A in court, claiming that the name of the new conservative denomination was too similar to that of the old denomination. The court ruled in favor of the PCUSA, and the PC of A in 1939 changed its name to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).

ESCHATOLOGY AND FUNDAMENTALISM

The events that led to the Presbyterian separation and the formation of the Presbyterian Church of America did not happen in isolation. The modernist-fundamentalist struggle crossed all denominational lines, especially in America. Among professing Christians the two opposite schools of thought and culture had been developing for decades. As liberalism or modernism developed its own theology, leadership, and program, so fundamentalism did likewise.

Fundamentalism in America in the early decades of the twentieth century found Christians from many denominations working together to defend the traditional basic doctrines of Christianity, “the fundamentals.” While Machen himself did not like the name fundamentalist (preferring the simple name Christian), he did state that he shared their historic faith; he had more in common with a “fundamentalist” Baptist than he did with a liberal Presbyterian.²

In America various contributing streams strengthened the fundamentalist movement. One such stream was the general conservatism within the mainline denominations. Presbyterian theologians such as B. B. Warfield defended the inerrancy of Scripture and the basic Christian and reformed teachings. Machen himself fought the liberals in his area of New Tes-

tament, demonstrating on a scholarly level that Paul’s religion came from Jesus, not the Greeks, and that Jesus’ birth from the Virgin Mary was an original doctrine in the church based on historical testimony and divine revelation. Robert Dick Wilson performed the same service for the Old Testament, defending its inspiration and truthfulness against liberal attacks. These Presbyterian theologians were not alone. They were joined by many other scholars within the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, as well as from other Protestant traditions. The many writers who in 1910-1917 contributed to *The Fundamentals*, that first popular manifesto of fundamentalist polemic theology, from which the name “fundamentalist” was derived, represented by-and-large this conservative tradition.

A second stream strengthening the fundamentalist cause was the pietistic movement, especially in England and America. These Bible-believing Christians put a much greater emphasis on personal Bible study, separation, holiness, and aggressive evangelism. Many organizations were formed to promote this approach, including Bible schools and colleges, mission agencies, and other interdenominational agencies. Frequently these Christians belonged to independent churches, and these agencies were their primary means of broader Christian fellowship. Theologically most of these Christians were dispensational, with a strong belief in the pretribulational, premillennial coming of Christ for his church.³ They were uniformly hostile to modernism; their theological system required verbal inspiration of Scripture, and literal exegesis. As one dispensational scholar said, “You’ll have to look hard to find a liberal dispensationalist.”⁴ The

Scofield Reference Bible, published in 1909 and 1917, furthered their cause; its editor, C. I. Scofield, had already published his *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course* in 1907. These publications greatly increased the popular acceptance of dispensationalism by conservative Christians.

Within the PCUSA many of the conservative pastors and churches had adopted much of this dispensational theology along with their own conservative Presbyterian doctrines. For example, Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of the strongly dispensational Dallas Theological Seminary, was a Presbyterian minister. Roy Talmage Brumbaugh taught a large class in the First Presbyterian Church in Tacoma, Washington, using the Scofield curriculum. Donald Grey Barnhouse of the Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia was a well-known dispensational Bible teacher. Most of these Presbyterians kept their beliefs in Presbyterian church government, infant baptism, and the covenant of grace, but adopted the eschatological scheme of pretribulational premillennialism taught by the dispensationalists. Many of them often pictured themselves as living in a predicted Laodicean Age (Rev 3:14-22), with the apostate liberal churches leading up to the scarlet woman astride the beast (Rev 17). Thus the command to “come out of her, my people” (Rev 18:4) was directly applicable to them—there must be a separation from the PCUSA and any other liberal denomination.

In the minds of many fundamentalists the premillennial coming of Christ was a doctrine so clearly taught by a literal reading of Scripture, that to deny that doctrine was a dangerous compromise

with unbelief. Even though many reformed churches and scholars were defending the fundamental doctrines, and received honor from fundamentalists, they still did not go far enough when they did not teach premillennialism. At the same time, many reformed writers were concerned about dispensationalism. In their view, dispensationalism was a dangerous teaching that destroyed the unity of the church and of the Bible, and that led to various other false teachings, such as antinomianism (or its opposite, legalism) and independency. This latter opinion was more common in reformed churches, such as those from the European continent, who had not been influenced by English or American dispensationalism. This included the Christian Reformed Church in America, with roots in Dutch Calvinism.

The tension between these two streams was graphically demonstrated February 4, 1937, when the Philadelphia Fundamentalists organization changed its constitution to include this statement: “We believe in ‘that blessed hope,’ the personal, premillennial and imminent return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Up to that time the organization had allowed members to have various eschatological views. Paul Woolley, a member, and himself a historic premillennialist and a faculty member at Westminster Seminary, objected, noting that this would exclude sound fundamentalists from membership. The president, Merrill T. MacPherson, agreed, but favored the motion anyway. This event was reported negatively in the following issue of the *Presbyterian Guardian*, edited by Ned Stonehouse;⁵ and it was reported positively in the *Christian Beacon*, a paper started in 1936 and edited by Carl McIntire.⁶ These two reactions, each from a member of the new

PC of A, illustrate the different approaches to eschatology found in reformed churches and in general American fundamentalism, as well as the tensions in the new church over eschatology.

ESCHATOLOGICAL DISSENTION IN THE PC OF A

Dr. Machen, the most prominent leader of the new church (PC of A), had established two independent agencies in his struggles with the liberals and inclusivists in the PCUSA. One was Westminster Theological Seminary and the other was the IBPFM. Although each had its own board of directors, he served as president of the board of both agencies. He invited many other Presbyterians to join him on these boards, representing all the prominent views of eschatology. For example, historic premillennialist Harold S. Laird was appointed secretary of the board of Westminster Seminary at its formation, and continued as such until he resigned in 1937.

Machen himself was amillennial, and he invited several other amillennialists to join the faculty at Westminster Seminary (including President Cornelius VanTil, Oswald T. Allis, John Murray, R. B. Kuiper, and Ned Stonehouse). However, Machen did not consider eschatology to be the major issue, and he also invited premillennialists Paul Woolley and Allan A. MacRae to join the faculty. While Woolley held to historic or posttribulational premillennialism, MacRae favored pretribulational premillennialism, which is often linked to dispensationalism. While some of the faculty at Westminster were trained in America, several came from reformed traditions in Europe, including VanTil and Kuiper from the Christian Reformed Church, and John Murray from the Presbyterian Church in Scotland. While

there was eschatological liberty for the faculty at Westminster, it was the amillennial view that was most strongly promoted.⁷

In a similar way, the IBPFM reflected a variety of eschatological positions. However, the premillennial presence on the mission board was stronger than it was on the seminary board. Perhaps the reason for this was that the cause of missions attracted active Presbyterian pastors and laymen, and these people were more influenced by the American fundamentalist movement and its premillennialism. This was especially true of those who favored the separatist position of Machen. Leading up to the time when the PC of A was formed in 1936, there was a crisis on both boards. The Westminster board had members who favored giving in to the PCUSA and resigning from the IBPFM, so that they could remain in the old church. And there were those in the mission board who opposed the separation, or at least the dissolution of the PCCU. There was a danger that one or both of them would repudiate Machen's stand. Machen fought hard to keep both boards loyal to the separatist position; this resulted in many resigning from those boards. But both institutions were saved for the new church. During these struggles some of Machen's strongest supporters on the IBPFM were premillennialists.

However, at the time of Machen's death the new church was quickly dividing into two camps. Several issues were involved, but this article will discuss eschatology in particular. The large majority of the voting delegates to the General Assemblies favored a continuation of the policy at Westminster Seminary.

A vocal minority, however, believed the premillennial position was important and was under attack in the new church. This second group had gained control of the IBPFM, and at its November 1936, meeting had replaced Machen as president with Harold S. Laird, a premillennialist. They also elected Merrill T. MacPherson, a dispensational premillennialist, as vice-president. Both these officers were pastors of independent churches. MacPherson himself was reluctant to join the PC of A because he feared that the new church was too hostile to his theology. To make matters worse, his church constitution renounced any future higher church jurisdiction whatever.

MacPherson's fears were not totally unfounded. There was a continuing war of words between writers in the *Presbyterian Guardian* and the *Christian Beacon* over ecclesiology and eschatology.⁸ Machen himself had assured premillennialists that there was freedom for them in the PC of A, even though their views were opposed to the Westminster standards, since they still held to the "system of doctrine" of the Standards.⁹ However, many of the premillennialists—especially the pretribulationist ones—still were concerned. John Murray and R. B. Kuiper wrote in the *Presbyterian Guardian* from the amillennial perspective. They both said that historic premillennialism was a permissible position in the church, but that dispensationalism was not. And this dispensationalism was often identified with pretribulationism.¹⁰ Some pretribulationists were already in the PC of A (such as MacRae and McIntire), as was J. Oliver Buswell, who held to the midtribulation position. These men were not yet accused in church courts of heresy, but it was feared that such was a pos-

sibility. The vehemence of some of the attacks against dispensationalism contributed to the reluctance of some men to join the new church. Looking back, we can see a problem of definitions. It was not clear to all what was meant by dispensationalism, and whether it was identical to pretribulationism. On the other hand, in the mind of some, premillennialism was the same as pretribulationist premillennialism.¹¹

When the second General Assembly of the PC of A met in 1936, it adopted the Westminster Standards, without the 1903 changes, and refused to change the wording of the eschatological parts. Nor did it pass even a resolution guaranteeing eschatological freedom. Premillennialists had hoped that the new church's confession would specifically allow their position. The majority of the Assembly believed that the church already had eschatological freedom, and that it was not necessary to change the church's standards so that premillennialism would be permitted; that view would remain opposed by the standards although allowed in the church. This policy made some premillennialists uncomfortable, with the possibility of future General Assemblies enforcing the confessional standards against them. The majority view would also exclude "dispensational" premillennialists, which many identified with pretribulationist premillennialists.¹²

The conflict between the two factions continued, made more intense by other disagreements as well, including the relation of alcoholic beverages to Christian liberty and the allowance of independency on the mission board. In April 1937, Harold S. Laird resigned from the board of Westminster Seminary, and Allan A.

MacRae resigned from its faculty. The creation of Faith Theological Seminary was announced. The seminary was to begin that fall in Wilmington, Delaware, and was to teach the premillennial return of Christ. After the meeting of the IBPFM on May 31, 1937, Paul Woolley and Ned Stonehouse resigned from that board, and Charles J. Woodbridge resigned as general secretary. In all these cases these same issues were the points of dissention.

It was not clear to all what was meant by dispensationalism, and whether it was identical to pretribulationism. On the other hand, in the mind of some, premillennialism was the same as pretribulation premillennialism.

By the time the third General Assembly of the PC of A met on June 1, the division seemed inevitable. The most significant action of the Assembly was its refusal to recommend the ministry of the IBPFM and its establishing of a committee to carry on its missionary work. The Assembly also refused to adopt a recommendation of total abstinence from alcoholic beverages. The eschatology issue stayed below the surface in that assembly.

A PREMILLENNIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The evening the General Assembly closed, June 4, 1937, fourteen ministers and three elders gathered and signed the "Articles of Association of the Bible Pres-

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byterian Fellowship." In this document they "associated" themselves "together in the Bible Presbyterian Synod." They appointed a committee to receive and organize presbyteries, whose actions would be reviewed at their "next Synod." They also declared their intent to preserve "the historic position of American Presbyterianism," apparently referring to total abstinence from alcoholic beverages and to various other precedents and traditions of the PCUSA. Regarding eschatology, it was their purpose to show continuation from the old church by keeping the Westminster standards as they were in the PCUSA in May 1936 (when the initial separation took place), but to "amend these standards in any particular in which the premillennial teaching of the Scriptures may be held to be obscured."¹³

A committee was appointed to suggest amendments to the church's constitution, consisting of Carl McIntire, J. U. Selwyn Toms, and H. McAllister Griffiths. When the first General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) met in September 1938, it adopted the recommended changes. The only changes made in the doctrinal standards were in the Confession of Faith and the Larger Catechism. Many individual parts of the standards were affected. The following changes, made in the Confession, are typical (deletions are lined out; additions are in italics):

Chapter 32, Of the State of Man After Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead

"2. At the ~~last day~~ *return of the Lord Jesus*, such *living persons* as are found ~~alive~~ *in him* shall not die, but be changed: and all the dead *in Christ*

shall be raised up with the self-same bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls for ever.”

“3. The bodies of the unjust shall, *after Christ has reigned on earth a thousand years* ~~by the power of Christ,~~ be raised *by the power of God* to dishonor; ~~the bodies of the just, by his Spirit unto honor, and be made conformable to his own glorious body.~~”

Chapter 33, Of the Last Judgment Things

“1. God hath appointed a day (*which day in Scripture in reference to the last things may represent a period of time including the thousand years following the visible, personal and pre-millennial return of Christ*) wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ

Even though the BPC thus became confessionally premillennial, it still intended to exercise eschatological liberty for its member churches and ministers. This intention was clear in the resolution adopted by that Synod:

“WHEREAS this General Synod has adopted changes in the Confession of Faith and the Larger Catechism which bring our doctrinal standards into harmony with the pre-millennial view of that blessed hope, the second coming of our Lord; and

“WHEREAS although we hold this view to be taught in God’s Word, we yet recognize that there are sincere Christians who hold to other views of the events which shall accompany our

Lord’s return but who nevertheless are one with us in receiving the system of doctrine taught in the Bible and stated in our doctrinal standards;

“THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this General Synod declares that subscription to our doctrinal standards upon the part of all office-bearers shall be understood as leaving them and our churches and members free to hold any eschatological view which includes the visible and personal return of our Lord to earth, and which is not otherwise inconsistent with the system of doctrine of the Bible and the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church.”

Thus the situation was reversed from that in the PC of A. In the PC of A the amillennial and postmillennial views were in agreement with the church’s constitution, and the premillennial view was tolerated. Now, in the BPC, the premillennial view was in agreement with the church’s constitution, and the postmillennial and amillennial views were tolerated. This toleration was stated, not only in the resolution, but also by the members of the committee that drafted the changes. H. McAllister Griffiths explained,

While the Bible Presbyterian Church is thus distinctly a premillennial Church, it has not made the ghastly mistake of withholding fellowship or communion from those Christian brethren who have not yet come to see the doctrine, or who may never come to see it—*on earth*. It welcomes into its fellowship and into its ministry those who may hold other views, so long as those views are not contrary to the system of Doctrine of the Bible

as it is set forth in the Confession. This is in accord with the great Presbyterian tradition, which has always maintained eschatological freedom.¹⁴

Likewise, Carl McIntire asserted this position—premillennialism with toleration for other views:

It is of historic significance that the Synod took action clearly setting forth the teaching of the Bible concerning the Lord's return. This is an important doctrine, but it is of a different nature from the issue of the apostasy of our day and the denial of the blood of Christ and the resurrection of Christ on the part of men in the visible Church. In this connection the Synod was careful to recognize the liberty of men to have different views concerning the Lord's return.¹⁵

This liberty was stated for those who held to the amillennial or postmillennial position. Even more so, there was liberty for various varieties of premillennial belief. Most of the BPC men were pretribulational, but not all. Buswell was midtribulational; Laird was posttribulational. And, of course, there are many variations in other details within the premillennial category. Most, if not all, of the early BPC men were aware of these variations.¹⁶ These varieties of premillennialism were what Griffiths had in mind when he wrote for the committee proposing the changes,

They [the changes] have been made conservatively, without any attempt to go into detail, and in the effort to change the Confession and Larger Catechism as little as possible. The Shorter Catechism needed no amend-

ment. We have tried to frame all the changes so that they will not raise issues about which believers in the premillennial return of our Lord may themselves differ.¹⁷

A careful reading of all the changes made by the first BPC Synod will show that all varieties of premillennialists—pretribulational, midtribulational, and posttribulational—would indeed agree with them. In fact, the most literal reading of the changes would seem to favor the posttribulational position more than the others. For example, Chapter 32 of the Confession, quoted above, mentions only the thousand years of the millennium as taking place between the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the lost—there is no mention of a seven-year tribulation in that interval, nor anywhere else in the revised Confession.

The explanation given for making the changes to the standards has been consistent. The changes were designed to guarantee the freedom of premillennialists, who had felt threatened or suppressed in the PC of A. They were designed also to attract other premillennialists, who had been holding themselves aloof, into the church. They were not designed to exclude other views.¹⁸

ESCHATOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE BPC

In the beginning years of the denomination most ministers and churches were, with few exceptions, premillennial and pretribulational. Most of the ministers did not consider themselves dispensational, since they held to the covenant of grace, believed in one way of salvation in both major dispensations, and practiced infant baptism. However, a few Bible Presbyte-

rians actually did adopt the dispensational label, and they were not criticized for it.¹⁹ As the Synod moved into the war years, it was active in many other areas, and its membership and agencies grew. With the horrors of the Second World War, the premillennial view became more popular than ever.

When the Collingswood Synod split off from the BPC in 1956, it kept the Bible Presbyterian name, while later (in 1961) the parent body (BPC Columbus Synod) changed its name to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The BPC Columbus Synod changed its constitution in 1960 to allow all three major eschatological views, but the BPC Collingswood Synod, and the BPC subsequently, kept the premillennial changes intact.²⁰

After that division the BPC position on the premillennial return of Christ seemed to harden and to become specifically pretribulational. The board of Faith Theological Seminary issued a statement in 1959 stating that it “interpreted the statement that the Seminary was premillennial to mean that the pre-tribulation rapture was in the premillennial view of the return of Christ,” and that the ministers of the Synod are “man for man believers in the pre-tribulation, premillennial return of Christ.”²¹ This declaration probably was prompted by the formation of Covenant Theological Seminary by leaders in the Columbus Synod, including former professors at Faith Theological Seminary. The professors at Covenant, and ministers in the Columbus Synod at large, held various views about the timing of the tribulation.

In the several decades that followed most presbyteries in the BPC required

new ministers to be premillennial and even pretribulational.²² It was very unusual for another viewpoint to be found in the church. One such exception was the reception of Dr. Stephen M. Reynolds into the BPC. He was a classic postmillennialist, in the tradition of Hodge and Warfield. He became professor of Old Testament at Faith Seminary and a member of the Philadelphia Presbytery.²³

In 1971 Allan MacRae was removed as president of Faith Seminary by the board because of conflicts over ecclesiastical and academic policy. Dr. MacRae and most of the faculty set up the Biblical School of Theology (later Biblical Theological Seminary), taking most of the student body with them to the new school. Dr. McIntire, chairman of the board of Faith, was himself appointed seminary president at Faith, and a new faculty was formed.²⁴ The new faculty was in some ways more self-consciously reformed. While holding to the eschatological position of the BPC, they taught covenant theology and distinguished their ecclesiology and eschatology from dispensationalism.²⁵ This faculty discovered the original position of the BPC favoring eschatological liberty, and considered the doctrine of the unity of the church under the covenant of grace as more basic and important than the millennial question, and certainly more important than the tribulation question. Men who graduated from Faith Seminary in the 1970s generally shared this position.

Meanwhile, in the Northwest Presbytery there was a new development. The Rev. H. Dennis Leaman, pastor of the BP church in Olympia, Washington, had by his own study changed his position from premillennial pretribulational to

amillennial, a position out of accord with the BPC Confession. The presbytery established a committee on eschatology to study the situation and make a recommendation. The committee's report was adopted in February 1981.²⁶ The report recommended "that the position taken by the First General Synod of the BPC in the said resolution [asserting eschatological liberty] be the position of this Presbytery." The presbytery then qualified this statement by saying that, since the church standards "teach the pre-millennial view to the exclusion of other views," the BPC as a whole should "promote" the premillennial view, and that those holding other views should respect that. They concluded:

"We ought not to maintain any position by depending upon ignorance or suppression, but rather we ought to rely upon enlightenment by God's Word and Spirit to sustain His truth. Further, where these distinctions of position are held, we ought to study to continue working together in mutual love and confidence."

However, other presbyteries did not yet share this toleration. For example, the New Jersey – Philadelphia Presbytery was holding up the ordination of three men, two of them graduating from Faith Seminary,²⁷ because their eschatology was not premillennial and pretribulational. The presbytery referred these men to the Faith Seminary faculty to have their views corrected.²⁸

When the Bible Presbyterian Synod met in October 1982, Dr. McIntire and others wanted a resolution passed supporting the pretribulational position of the church. This position had never before been specified in official church docu-

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ments. The resolution was introduced and passed on the last day of Synod. It stated that the "imminent return of Christ in His Second Coming has been the Blessed Hope of the Bible Presbyterians from the beginning," and further, "The church will not go through the Tribulation." The resolution did note the First Synod's declaration for eschatological liberty, but interpreted it that no one will be disciplined for other views; it did not specify this liberty for new men coming into the church. This liberty "in no way moderates the witness of the church to the imminent, premillennial return of Christ, taught in the Holy Scriptures."²⁹ By "imminent" this statement means pretribulational, since it was believed that the tribulation would be an identifiable event that therefore could not precede the rapture and resurrection of the just. This was the first and the last such declaration from the BPC.

When Dr. McIntire walked out of the BP Synod meeting of 1984 and established his own “continuing Synod,” he was able, as in the earlier divisions in 1937 and 1956, to maintain control of Faith Seminary and the IBPFM. The BP Synod recognized as approved independent agencies the Presbyterian Missionary Union and Western Reformed Seminary. Since that time eschatological liberty for views within premillennialism and even for other millennial views has become more the norm in BP presbyteries. In 1990 the Synod passed a resolution “On Eschatological Liberty” that reaffirmed the original resolution of 1938, stating that eschatology is “a doctrine which [the Synod] has, from the beginning, perceived as not essential to the system of doctrine.” It further asked that this liberty would “not become the occasion of division.”³⁰ In 1996 the BPC went on record opposing dispensationalism. In that resolution it warned against dispensationalism as “egregious error, contrary to Holy Scriptures and against the person and the work of Christ.”³¹

Today the Bible Presbyterian Church is a reformed church that strongly supports covenant theology, and that, as a Synod, holds to the premillennial return of Christ. However, it recognizes that eschatological opinions are not a part of our required system of doctrine, and rejoices to work with churches and ministers who hold to other eschatological beliefs. Those in the BPC who hold to the premillennial return of Christ believe that the best way to promote that view is through Bible study and discussion in an atmosphere of mutual love and confidence, without compulsion or pressure. We can all work together as we wait for “the blessed hope—the glori-

ous appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” 

¹ The historical information in this and the following sections has been well documented and can be found in various sources. To save space, I do not footnote each detail; questions about specific documentation may be sent to the author. Here are some secondary sources with documentation: Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1940; reprinted, Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1992); Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954); Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church Since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1957); *A Brief History of the Bible Presbyterian Church and Its Agencies*, compiled by Margaret G. Harden (n.p. [Collingswood, New Jersey: Christian Beacon Press], n.d. [ca. 1966]); George P. Hutchinson, *The History Behind the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod* (Cherry Hill, New Jersey: Mack Publishing Company, 1974); *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. by Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986); Robert K. Churchill, *Lest We Forget: A Personal Reflection on the Formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (2nd ed.; [Philadelphia]: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian

Church, 1987); Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994); David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Volume 2: The Majestic Testimony 1869-1929* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996).

² Note the evaluation of George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), especially ch. 7, "Understanding J. Gresham Machen," 182-201.

³ This is a main point of Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970).

⁴ Statement made in class at Grace Theological Seminary by professor John C. Whitcomb (1973).

⁵ "Premillennialism Adopted Constitutionally by Philadelphia Fundamentalist Group—Several Premillennialist Members Raise Protests," *The Presbyterian Guardian* 3:214.

⁶ "Fundamentalists Adopt Pre-Mil. View—Philadelphia Body Adopts Resolution with Little Opposition," *Christian Beacon* 2:1 (Feb 11, 1937) 1-2.

⁷ This was the point forcefully made in the letter of resignation of Allan A. MacRae, reproduced in the *Presbyterian Guardian* 4:3 (May 15, 1937) 50, and in the *Christian Beacon* (Apr. 29, 1937) 1-2: "Within the Seminary, teachers in various departments assail the truth of the premillennial return of

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Christ so that strong pressure is brought to bear upon the students to give up this doctrine. No place whatever is offered in the courses required for graduation for an adequate defense of this doctrine by one who holds it. Every instructor in any department which could properly give any great amount of time to examining the important New Testament evidence regarding premillennialism is hostile to the doctrine. There is no opportunity for giving any comprehensive defense at all comparable to the measure in which it is assailed."

⁸ Especially during the years 1936-1937.

⁹ "Premillennialism," *Presbyterian Guardian* 3:2 (Oct. 24, 1936) 45. There is an excellent recent discussion of this controversy by J. V. Fesko, "The Legacy of Old School Confession Subscription in the OPC," *JETS* 46:4 (Dec. 2003) 673-698, esp. pp. 687-691.

¹⁰ This same position was later expanded at great length by O. T. Allis, who had been one of the early Westminster professors, in *Prophecy and the Church: An Examination of the Claim of Dispensationalists That the Christian Church Interrupts the Kingdom Prophecies to Israel* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945).

¹¹ This confusion seems to be evident in later statements by Carl McIntire and some of his associates. For example, according to the *Free Press* (Nov. 20, 1959), "The Board of Directors of Faith Theological Seminary . . . declared that it interpreted the statement that the Seminary was premillennial to mean that the pre-tribulation rapture was in the premillennial view of the return of Christ" (quoted in the *Bible Presbyterian Reporter* 5:3 (Mar. 1960) 1. This

identification was clearly stated later by McIntire: [writing about Western Reformed Seminary and its president John Battle] “In their printed literature they announce that the seminary is premillennial. But it is a new kind of premillennialism. Our churches over the land have believed that they would not go through the tribulation. Battle, who is president, does believe that the church will go through the dreadful tribulation which Christ said would be worse than anything the world has seen. But since the tribulation will be over at the beginning of the millennium, he calls their seminary premillennial. This view is virtually amillennial as it has these elements in it of the tribulation” (Carl McIntire, mass letter sent “To the Members of Our Bible Presbyterian Church,” Oct. 28, 1983, p. 6).

¹² This is still the position of the OPC: “The second Assembly in 1936 declined to declare that historic (nondispensational) premillennialism, along with amillennialism and postmillennialism, was compatible with our church standards. Nonetheless, all three views have been welcome within the OPC” (*What Is the OPC?* [Willow Grove, Penn: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2001], 8).

¹³ This document, and the constitutional changes and resolutions related to the founding of the BPC are now available online: <http://bpc.org/synod/minutes/1938.html>. As it worked out, the BPC did not adopt the standards as they were in 1936; the revisions of 1903 were rejected, as they had been by the PC of A, with the exception of an amended Declaratory Statement.

¹⁴ “Impressions of the First General Synod,” *Christian Beacon* (Sept. 15,

1938) 1.

¹⁵ “General Synod,” *Christian Beacon* (Sept. 15, 1938) 4.

¹⁶ For example, Allan A. MacRae had written a review of the posttributational book, *The Approaching Advent of Christ* by Alexander Reese, published in 1932. The review appeared in the *Sunday School Times* of May 7, 1938 (the article is unsigned in the *SST*, but in personal correspondence to me [Aug. 30, 1982] Dr. MacRae confirmed that he was the author of the article).

¹⁷ “Covering Letter on Constitution,” *Christian Beacon* (Aug. 18, 1938) 1, 7.

¹⁸ McIntire, “General Synod,” 4. This was stated later by another BPC founder, J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., “Realized Millennialism,” *Bible Presbyterian Reporter* 5:3 (Mar. 1960) 4. In personal conversations, this reason was given to me on various occasions by Carl McIntire and Allan A. MacRae. Once, in the mid-1970s, I asked Dr. McIntire what he would do if an amillennial OPC minister wanted to join the BPC because of our stand on other issues. His reply was, “Well, I guess we would have to let him come in. But it would cause a lot of trouble!”

¹⁹ For example, BP minister and missionary Arthur J. Dieffenbacher wrote an article, “The Faith of a Dispensationalist” defending that viewpoint and aligning himself with H. A. Ironside and the Scofield Bible. This article was published on the front page of the *Christian Beacon* (Sept. 9, 1937) 1, 8. Dieffenbacher later served as an Army chaplain, and was killed in action in Normandy.

²⁰ Details of this division can be found in Hutchinson, 285-306 (Columbus perspective), and in Harden, 91-100 (Collingswood perspective).

²¹ *Free Press* (Nov. 20, 1959); quoted in the *Bible Presbyterian Reporter* 5:3 (Mar. 1960) 1.

²² This has been the experience of many current Bible Presbyterian ministers when they were seeking ordination, at least up to the early 1980s. For example, when I became the chairman of the Candidates and Credentials Committee of the New Jersey Presbytery (to which Carl McIntire belonged) in 1977, I discovered a policy paper in the committee file that stated that the presbytery had determined some time before that for a ministerial candidate to be licensed by the presbytery, he must be premillennial, and to be ordained, he must be pretribulationist.

²³ IBPFM missionaries Dwight Malsbary and Ralph Cunningham were “closet” posttribulationist premillennialists (letter of Dwight Malsbary to Robert Anderson [Mar. 19, 1975]; personal conversation with Ralph Cunningham [ca. 1981; Rev. Cunningham recommended several posttribulationist books to me, but asked me to keep this information confidential, as it might have made difficulties for him and the IBPFM; he is now with the Lord, and I feel free to mention this]).

²⁴ Dr. Alfred W. Eppard continued as professor of New Testament; he was joined by several younger men, sometimes called “the three B’s”—Barry J. Beitzel, John A. Battle, and Charles J. Butler. Barry Beitzel taught at Faith a short time, and then moved to Trinity Evangelical School of Theology; he now is executive vice president/provost at Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois; he was replaced at Faith by Stephen M. Reynolds. Stephen Reynolds and Charles Butler left the

faculty in 1976, when the BPC Synod dissolved the Philadelphia Presbytery. Dr. Eppard died suddenly in 1977. John Battle resigned from the faculty in 1982 and moved to Tacoma, Washington, where Western Reformed Seminary was started in 1983.

²⁵ This position is illustrated by the later article of John Battle, “Premillennialism and Covenant Theology,” *WRS Journal* 2:1 (Winter, 1995) 2-6 [available online at http://www.wrs.edu/volume_2-1.htm].

²⁶ *Minutes of the Northwest Presbytery of the BPC* (Feb. 18, 1981).

²⁷ *Minutes of the New Jersey – Philadelphia Presbytery of the BPC* (Jan. 9, 1982, and May 8, 1982). Both these men, R. J. Gore and John C. Wilking, were at that time premillennial and posttribulationist.

²⁸ During this same time I was teaching the theology courses at Faith Seminary, and by my own study had come to the posttribulationist position, and was therefore an unsuitable agent to assist the presbytery in its efforts. I was promoting the idea of eschatological liberty, but the seminary leadership supported the presbytery’s position. As in 1959, the seminary board equated premillennialism with pretribulationism. I resigned my position at Faith in the summer of 1982.

²⁹ “Resolution 17: The Imminent Return of Christ,” *Minutes of the Forth-Sixth General Synod of the BPC* (Oct. 7-13, 1982), 107-108.

³⁰ *Minutes of the Fifty-Fourth General Synod of the BPC* (Aug. 9-15, 1990), 181.

³¹ *Minutes of the Sixtieth General Synod of the BPC* (Aug. 1-6, 1996), 167.

OPPORTUNITIES

THE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH: STRIVING FOR PURITY AND ADEQUATELY SERVING THE LORD

ALBERT W. COOK

I have been a pastor in the Bible Presbyterian Church for forty-one years. I would say that the Bible Presbyterian Church is striving for purity and adequately serving the Lord. I would rate the denomination high in its biblical adherence and adherence to its own doctrinal standards. When it comes to adequacy, it gets a passing grade, but there is room for improvement.

Historically, the Bible Presbyterian Church can trace its existence to the desire to have a Presbyterian Church true to God's Word and blessed of Him. I will briefly mention the Protestant Reformation, Presbyterian struggles here in America, and in particular, the rise and decline of the Bible Presbyterian Church. My sincere hope is that we will see our Bible Presbyterian Church expand its ministry in the 21st century.

I have enjoyed my ministry in the Church, and hope that many will consider serving in it. It is my opinion that the Bible Presbyterian Church was for many years a unique blend of the Reformed Faith and Fundamentalism. In many ways it profited from this position. For example: it preached the doctrines of Grace, and had a great evangelistic zeal. The emphasis was: the Bible says, rather than the Reformed Faith says. The messages from

pulpits were not just to the head but to the heart and soul, urging people to salvation and obedience in their walk with the Lord.

When I speak of churches impure and striving for purity, I am talking about adherence to the doctrinal truth of Scripture. We know that total purity will only be achieved in heaven. Adequacy has to do with the ability to take biblical truth and apply it to the life of the Church. It is important to stand for "thus saith the Lord." It is important to be tolerant on those things that are not "thus saith the Lord," and to be able to distinguish between the two.

CHURCHES IMPURE AND INADEQUATE (ROMAN CATHOLIC AND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH U.S.A.)

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, the church had become so impure and inadequate that it had lost the gospel. People who followed its teachings were led down the broad road that leads to destruction. "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matt. 7:13, 14) The Protestant Reformation was a great revival. The gospel was rediscovered and many were saved by trusting in Christ as their Savior.

As the Protestant Reformation unfolded, the Presbyterian Church was born. It had a glorious ministry from John Knox (1514-1572), to Charles Hodge (1797-1878). Great Presbyterian beliefs include the following:

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- The Bible is our only rule of faith and practice (2 Tim 3:15-17)
- God alone is Lord of the conscience (1 Thess 4:1)
- The Westminster Standards (1643-1648) were adopted as the secondary doctrinal standard of the Church (2 Tim 2:15)
- Church government and church discipline are to be administered through church courts (Session, Presbytery, Synod; Acts 15; Matt 18:15-20)
- The eldership, both teaching and ruling, all have the same authority (1 Pet 5:1-5)

The first Synod of the Presbyterian Church in America was constituted in 1716. The Presbyterian Church grew and had a great influence on our country's form of government. The freedom we cherish so much today is rooted in scripture as expounded by Presbyterians. Great revivals broke out in the land, and educational institutions at all levels were established under Presbyterian ministry.

It is my opinion that the Bible Presbyterian Church was for many years a unique blend of the Reformed Faith and Fundamentalism.

In time, evolution and higher criticism began to make inroads into the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It affected the churches, mission programs, colleges,

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and seminaries. Dr. J. Gresham Machen's book *Christianity and Liberalism* stated that liberalism was not Christianity, but a new and false religion. By 1924, the Auburn Affirmation and its views had been accepted in the Presbyterian Church. A broad and inclusive position was accepted that no longer required ministers and elders to believe these truths:

- The Bible is the inerrant Word of God (Ps 19:7-14)
- Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary (Isa 7:14 with Matt 1:22-25)
- Jesus bodily rose from the dead (1 Cor 15)
- Jesus suffered on the cross to atone for our sin (Heb 10)
- Jesus performed miracles (Matt 12:22-28)

The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. had now become very impure and inadequate, denying both scripture and its own doctrinal standards. On March 17, 1935, Dr. J. Gresham Machen gave his confession from the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania:

My profession of faith is simply that I know nothing of the Christ proclaimed, through the Auburn Affirmation, by the Moderator of that Commission. I know nothing of a Christ who is presented to us in a human book containing errors, but know only a Christ presented in a divine Book, the Bible, which is true from beginning to end. I know nothing of a Christ who possibly was and possibly was not born of a virgin, but know only a Christ who was truly conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. I know nothing of a Christ who

possibly did and possibly did not work miracles, but know only a Christ who said to the winds and the waves, with the sovereign voice of the Maker and Ruler of all nature, "Peace, be still." I know nothing of a Christ who possibly did and possibly did not come out of the tomb on the first Easter morning, but know only a Christ who triumphed over sin and the grave and is living now in His glorified body until He shall come again and I shall see Him with my very eyes. I know nothing of a Christ who possibly did and possibly did not die as my substitute on the cross, but know only a Christ who took upon Himself the just punishment of my sins and died there in my stead to make me right with the holy God.

Through it all, the Bible Presbyterian Church has maintained its integrity to Scripture and the Westminster Standards. Our great need is to be able to deal with lesser issues in a way that brings peace, purity, and unity to our Church.

When certain ministers and elders would not accept the errors of the Auburn Affirmation they were tried and put out of the Church. It is indeed an eye-opener when one learns how tolerant liberal min-

isters are to error, and how intolerant they are of truth.

It was during this time of struggle that Bible believing Presbyterian organizations were formed: In 1928, Westminster Theological Seminary; In 1933, The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions; In 1936, The Presbyterian Church of America. Like the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, the separation from unbelief was of the Lord and according to His Word. God has commanded us to separate from unbelief when our attempts to reform the Church have failed.

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, I will dwell in them and walk among them, I will be their God and they shall be My people. Therefore, Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. (2 Cor 6:14-18)

CHURCHES STRIVING FOR PURITY AND ADEQUACY: PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AMERICA, ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, AND BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The death of Dr. J. Gresham Machen was one of the reasons the new Presbyterian Church of America had a brief existence. Issues of lesser importance than

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those of the Auburn Affirmation began to come forward. They included these areas:

- Eschatology – amillennialism, premillennialism, postmillennialism
- Denominational control or independent control of church agencies
- Issues of Christian liberty, especially the church's position on the drinking of alcoholic beverages
- Issues concerning the Bible's teaching on separation from believers in, or working with, apostate groups (2nd degree separation)

While these issues were not major in defining Presbyterianism, they were allowed to become divisive and split the church. Out of this struggle the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Bible Presbyterian Church were founded in 1938.

It is my opinion that this separation should never have happened. There is no perfect Presbyterian Church, or pastor. "The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no church of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth, to worship God according to His will." (WCF 25:5)

We should seek ways of working together with those Presbyterians who like us are striving for purity and adequacy in serving the Lord. There is much said in scripture about purity, unity, and peace (see Eph 4:1-16). I have enjoyed God's faithfulness in using the Bible Presbyterian Church for His purpose. It has been very rewarding to work with others who truly are saved, love the Lord, and are seeking to please Him. God has given us

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His Word and the Bible Presbyterian Church has sought to obey it. There have been times of salvation and real church growth.

As a denomination we have been blessed with godly men who have led in establishing mission boards, colleges, seminaries, rest homes, conference centers, radio broadcasts, interdenominational church fellowships (nationally and worldwide), youth ministries, and international Christian relief centers. Truly God has blessed the Bible Presbyterian Church.

The Bible Presbyterian Church has been consistent in its loyalty to Scripture and the Westminster Standards since its founding. It has at times been inadequate in dealing with minor and administrative issues. "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand" (Rom 12:4). These problems have caused split after split. Therefore, today, the Bible Presbyterian Church is a remnant of what it was just forty years ago. Our future depends on being able to deal with minor issues and administrative problems without splitting the Church.

A CHURCH MAINTAINING ITS PURITY AND IMPROVING ITS ADEQUACY: THE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

I praise God for continuing to use the Bible Presbyterian Church. Some of the signs of His blessing are our young people who are training and considering serving in the Bible Presbyterian Church, and younger ministers who are having good and faithful ministries in our churches. Another may be those of us who are re-

tired or near retirement being of help to these gifted younger leaders.

As we enter into the 21st century, we must adequately deal with the issues that come our way without splitting the Church. "That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another" (1 Cor 12:25). We must be careful not to destroy our own denomination. Here are some areas that come to mind to enable us to improve the Bible Presbyterian Church.

- We must humble ourselves before God and one another. Many problems are caused by pride and failure to forgive and be reconciled (1 Pet 5:1-11).
- We must solve problems in our independent agencies and not allow them to overwhelm the local churches and the denomination. Our first priority is to build the local church.
- We need to make a real effort to enlarge our local congregations through evangelism and discipleship. We must not be hesitant in our pulpits to encourage people to repent of their sins and trust in Christ as their Savior (1 Cor 1:20-25).
- It is important that we all keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 20-21). When we remove the log in our own eye we will be of more help to others (Matt 7:1-5).
- We should seek fellowship with other Bible believing Presbyterian Churches (1 John 3:14).
- Beware of having a high view of the Bible but preaching politics instead. God's people must be taught God's Word (2 Tim 4:1-5).
- Christ is the head of the Church (Col 1:16-18). May we always seek to please Him rather than men (Gal 1:10).
- Beware of legalism in all of its forms. I understand legalism to be taking a strong stand on issues not clear in Scripture and making them a rule of faith and practice. The Bible does teach liberty in some matters, and we should avoid judging one another in these areas (Rom 14:1-23).
- We used to use the Harvey Cedars Resolution (1945) as our position on separation. It stated that we separate from those who deny God's Word in doctrine or practice. It also warned that there were risks in fellowshiping with those who are true to Scripture themselves but remain in apostate churches. I believe this to be a biblical position, and one we can practice with consistency.

[The Harvey Cedars Resolution of 1945:

(1) We hold that it is a Christian's duty to separate himself from all cooperation in religious activities with those who deny the full authority and dependability of the Word of God, and that no consideration of expediency could ever warrant such cooperation.

(2) As concerns cooperation with those who, while themselves believing in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, continue in membership in denominations which include

known unbelievers, and fail to see clearly and to observe fully the scriptural injunction to separate themselves from such organizations, we hold that this is a sphere of expediency, that is, one in which no man's conscience may be bound by other men; however, we as a Synod feel that great harm is done in many cases by such cooperation, and hence that it is unwise to enter upon or continue in them without careful consideration.

(3) Regarding such individuals as are described in paragraph (1), we should seek by every possible means to win them to Christ; regarding such individuals as are described in paragraph (2), we urge that they be dealt with in a spirit of brotherly love, seeking by every proper means to win them to the scriptural position of separation rather than to drive them from us, and yet not violating our conscience.]

- As our Church becomes more reformed, we must be careful not to become hyper-Calvinists. May we be the means God uses to win the lost and build His Church.
- We need to strive for the purity, peace and unity of the Church. All three of these are important. We must not be content with one or two of the three (Ordination Vow).
- Our agencies, whether synod controlled or independent, must give accurate and understandable reports to their supporters.
- Financial matters must be kept in such a way as to be acceptable to God and men (2 Cor 8:21)

- We need to hold firm to the biblical account of creation. God created all things out of nothing by the Word of His power in six days, and it was very good. There is no reason to interpret "days" other than twenty-four hour days.
- We must reach out to Bible believing colleges and seminaries and encourage their graduates to become ministers and missionaries in our denomination.
- Our book of discipline should be revised so that the steps of discipline are clear. It is always the purpose to restore the offender to good standing in the Church as God changes the heart.
- We should keep a balanced ministry by preaching the whole counsel of God to our congregations (Acts 20:26-28).

CONCLUSION

Clearly the Bible Presbyterian Church was born out of conflict, and has had its own problems. Through it all, it has maintained its integrity to Scripture and the Westminster Standards. Our great need is to be able to deal with lesser issues in a way that brings peace, purity, and unity to our Church. May God be pleased to lead us all in building a strong Bible Presbyterian Church. As we stand "For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ," let us remember who God's people are. "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people, but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet 2:9-10). 

A YOUNG MINISTER'S LOOK AT THE BIBLE PRESBYTE- RIAN CHURCH

TITO S. LYRO

I came into the Bible Presbyterian Church in 1992 at the age of nineteen. The events that led me to the BP Church were clear evidence of God's sovereign hand working out his providence in my life. I was supposed to attend a school on the East Coast. However, in a space of two weeks all the plans changed drastically and I ended up in Olympia, Washington, at Pastor Dennis Leaman's home. Soon after my arrival, the Lord saved me and called me to serve him. In 1999, I was called to serve as assistant pastor at the Bible Presbyterian Church of Olympia, at which time the Northwest Presbytery ordained me. Now I am 30 years old and quite often find myself being asked about what I think of the Bible Presbyterian Church and what the opportunities are for young men that want to serve the Lord in this denomination.

When I look at the Bible Presbyterian Church, I see the place to be for a young pastor first and foremost because this denomination is faithful to the Word of God. About a year and a half ago, Pastor John Dyck¹ and I were involved in a cyber conversation with a young Bible Presbyterian man who was studying for the ministry. This young man asked us if the Bible Presbyterian was a successful denomination. He defined success as the amount of influence a denomination has on society. In answering his question, Pastor Dyck wisely pointed him to the fact that, according to the Scriptures, success is defined as faithfulness to God's Word.

The Bible Presbyterian Church has been faithful to our Lord's Word, thus making it a very successful denomination. Young men who serve the Lord in the Bible Presbyterian Church will be challenged and encouraged to "keep the faith once delivered to the saints." This is something that must be attractive to every man who truly wants to serve the Lord.

The Bible Presbyterian Church is also a place for young pastors to be because of the opportunities that are available to them. Currently there are several vacant pulpits in the denomination². Granted, some of the churches without pastor consist of two or three families; nevertheless, they have a building that can be used at no cost³ at the very least. In addition to the vacant pulpits, there are those pulpits that will eventually become vacant. There are quite a few pastors who are nearing retirement and will be looking for a young man to take over the ministry. So, we need young men who will be ready for those pulpits.

Another reason why young men should want to be part of the Bible Presbyterian Church is the concern that the ordained pastors exhibit for the men under their care. I experienced it first hand during my years as a candidate for the ministry in the Northwest Presbytery. Ministers would often call or visit me to see how I was doing. They would schedule study sessions to complement my seminary education. They would also simply pray for and with me. That is something I now try to do for the men that are under my care. I know that the care bestowed upon the young men is not peculiar to the Northwest Presbytery alone. I have heard testimonies from the Great Lakes, Florida, and South Atlantic

presbyteries that confirm they follow the same practice as the Northwest Presbytery. This is very important for a young man to consider. The support and concern of several experienced pastors are invaluable for someone who is endeavoring to learn the ropes of the ministry.

Young men should look at the work of Western Reformed Seminary and Presbyterian Missionary Union and want to be part of the denomination that sponsors these agencies. PMU provides an excellent machine to help young men start new churches at home. Although the resources are limited, everything is in place to assist the planting of a new Bible Presbyterian church. New works are being started in Elma, Washington; Springville, New York; Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Sarasota, Florida; and in Southern California, with new contacts coming in every month. On another front, Western Reformed Seminary provides a learning environment conducive to academic excellence. From the small class sizes to the instructors' willingness to interact with the students, the atmosphere is one of scholarship and camaraderie. At this point one might say, "You don't have to be part of the Bible Presbyterian Church to attend Western Reformed." That is true. However, there is scholarship money reserved for Bible Presbyterian students. While any one would be welcome to study at WRS, only Bible Presbyterians would have access to those moneys.

Finally, young men should desire to be in the Bible Presbyterian Church because of its theological position. The Bible Presbyterian Church has come a long way through the years and is now more Reformed and Presbyterian than ever. There is a strong movement toward

closer adherence to the Westminster standards and the Lord has thus far spared us from some of the theological struggles that have assailed other Presbyterian denominations. The Bible Presbyterian Church also offers a premillennial understanding of the Scriptures. Yet, it recognizes that there is much to learn in this area and acknowledges the liberty that each officer and church member has in it.

As I look at the Bible Presbyterian Church and think of the future ahead of me, I cannot think of any other group I would rather be associated with. The opportunities are great and the denomination is in a position to be mightily used by the Lord in advancing his kingdom. There is a lot of work available for young men who desire to serve the Lord in this portion of his vineyard. 📖

¹ Pastor John Dyck serves as pastor of the Edmonton Bible Presbyterian Church, Alberta, Canada.

² The following churches do not have a called pastor: Bible Presbyterian Church of Apollo, Pennsylvania; Trinity Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Ohio; Bible Presbyterian Church in Minerva, Ohio; Bible Presbyterian Church in Manchester, Missouri; Faith Bible Presbyterian Church, Falls Church, Virginia; Bible Presbyterian Church in Grand Junction, Colorado; Columbia Bible Presbyterian Church in Scappoose, Oregon, has also a vacant pulpit; however, that congregation has asked Dr. John Battle to supply the pulpit indefinitely.

³ The church would have to pay for utilities, but no rent or mortgage.

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