

War Against Propositional Truth, 5 pgs

Some aspects of the Emerging Church movement involve the minimizing of propositional truth. This can be expressed in propositions such as the following: *We serve Christ, not **propositions** about him; It is Christ who unites us, **doctrines** divide us; We should ask, **Who** do you trust, not **what** do you believe.*

Loving Christ includes loving true propositions about Christ and his work, the truths of God's revelation. The content expressed in propositions identifies and describe **which Christ I depend on**, whether it is the Christ of the Bible or not. Replacing propositions about Christ with the mere word Christ leaves the statement vague and subjective, open to misuse. It is the same battle **Athanasius fought with Arius** in the 4th century and **Machen** with modernism (liberalism) in the early 20th. **Francis Schaeffer** spoke and wrote extensively on the subject of propositional truth, reason, and epistemology. He even coined the phrase true truth to refer to historically and factually accurate objective statements.

Since the beginning, God's people have been attacked in every way imaginable. But, all opposition, subtle or direct, whether deception and coercion leading to moral corruption, or distortion of God's Word, involves some form of departure from revelation or discrediting of historic fact.¹ The Bible, especially the NT, as well as secular history are filled with such examples and warnings about neglect and subversion of truth.

What was it if not **particular content** that Paul spoke of to the Ephesian elders? **Acts 20:26b-27**, *I am innocent of the blood of you all [proposition] for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God [reason].* Paul committed the ministry of earnestly shepherding the flock of God to the elders (v.28), which were to pick up where he left off. The focus of this shepherding was to protect believers from teachings that twist the apostolic doctrines (v.29-30) which are the grounds of unity and purity in the body.

Rom.6:17, ... you ... have become obedient from the heart to the standard [pattern] of teaching to which you were committed.

2 Tim.1:13-14, Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me ... guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

At Ephesus, Paul spoke boldly for 3 months [in the synagogue], reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. When the unbelievers [whose heart had hardened] began publicly reacting against the Gospel, Paul withdrew ... taking the disciples with him [and] reasoning daily ... for 2 years, he taught them the word of the Lord, **Acts 19:8-10**

1. The student of the NT should be primarily a historian. The center and core of all the Bible is history. Everything else that the Bible contains is fitted into a historical framework and leads up to a historical climax. The Bible is primarily a record of events, **J. Gresham Machen's** opening statement of his inaugural address, entitled **HISTORY AND FAITH**, as assistant prof. of NT at Princeton Theological Seminary, 1915. He was confronting modernism [what we call liberalism] as it attempted to divorce Christianity from history.

READING AND DISCUSSING SCRIPTURE (with sons [Eric](#) & [Kevin](#))

It seems to me that Christians miss fundamental things when reading the Bible. We miss things that are so foundational because we were never trained to think, either to identify and question presuppositions or to learn the rules of logic. These most critical thinking skills are not taught in public schools or even in most Christian schools.

I would add that the lack of fundamental understanding is largely a lack of mental discipline. As fallen humans we are fundamentally lazy in our evaluation and response to the world around us. For some the idea of busy, busy, busy would absolve them of any accusation of slothfulness, but it does not. I'm convinced that we don't know how to think because we're content to react. E

Our thinking is really sloppy in that (1) we don't start from that foundational point and (2) our reasoning has gaps. In other words, we fail to begin at the beginning, the necessary presuppositional underlayment of our thinking. Most people are not aware of their framework or the reasons for it. Since we are not aware that our starting point is not the beginning, we do not consider what the beginning is and why it must be what it is. With every omitted foundational principle and gap comes the danger of crossing over logical boundaries in the way we reason.

There are many topics among Christians that are considered complicated and divisive, but that are really very simple if one looks past the particular difficulty and meditates on the heart of the matter. The whole topic of divorce is a good example of this. If you're reading your Bible carefully you cannot come to any other conclusion except that God hates divorce, and that it's only because of our sin that it exists. Once we understand that, we know that God's desire is forgiveness and reconciliation. The next three paragraphs expand on this pretty well. E

Char and I have often talked about presentations, books, or articles whose conclusions we agree with, but whose reasoning leading to them brakes down and is inconsistent with those conclusions. [see <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2009/01/getting-theologically-humiliated/>] When someone does this, he is doing more than just thinking poorly, he is teaching people faulty methodology - the wrong way to reason. As a result, people become insensitive to proper logic and subject to being swayed by faulty logic which can turn the truth around [see Teaching in Contradiction].

I agree, but would extend that by adding that instead of simply bad thinking, you get bad thinking + muddy thinking. The introduction of bad logic makes the process and the conclusion confusing and subjective. E

Often these fundamentals of beginnings and "logic" are necessary implications rather than direct statements in Scripture. For example, when the Pharisees tested Jesus on the matter of divorce (Mt.19:3-9), Jesus answered by pointing out the implications stemming from God's intent in making mankind as man and woman. In Genesis 1 & 2, the contrast between man and God is more than the difference between the creator and his creation. It is seen in the nature of each - God who is **Us** (a complete, independent and unified plurality) and Adam who is **alone**. The aloneness of man is the only thing in God's creation that was not good. Eve is the counterpart God made for Adam to complement him. Husbands and wives are so joined till death because **it is only for this life that this union exists**.

Further, marriage as a permanent bond between a man and a woman is metaphorically used to des-

cribe God's union with His people. The completion of man, who would once again be alone after death, is in union with Christ. All who are in Christ become joined and together represent the bride of Christ (**Eph.5:25-27, 31-32**) awaiting the marriage of the Lamb (**Rev.19:7-8; 21:9-10; 22:17**). This image completes the picture of God's love described in the Old Testament as His love for Israel, His unfaithful people (**Ezek.16:6-14; Hos.2:16, 19-20**). *In Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form; and you [plural] are complete in Him, Col.2:9-10.*

*Another reason people think wrongly or muddily is that they don't want to believe the alternative. Fundamentally, error stems from sin. **A will that is not submitted to God resists the truth and will refuse to accept even the most complete and convincing argument.** My roommate and I got into a discussion about heaven and whether he will still be married to his wife. I read the passage to him, **for in heaven there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage** but he flat out said, "I won't believe that". Though he may not be a Christian, we even do this as Christians. At Patrick Henry College when I was studying different philosophers and authors, I encountered several individuals who, for all I could tell, understood the gospel completely but were simply unwilling to believe it. [In *The God Who is There*, Francis Schaeffer spoke of the point at which philosophers could find no answers to the big questions using normal (classical) logic. When they reached a point where they had to either return to God or abandon their reason, they abandoned the standard method of reasoning!] What is true for the gospel as a whole is also true for its parts. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of understanding. **As we approach Scripture we must come willing to be transformed by its teachings.** For my roommate, I think it came down to not having a big enough view of God to understand what heaven is about—he thought that because we call it "paradise" it will be everything he desires most, and what he desired most (at the time) was his wife. K*

As the preceding paragraphs illustrate, **there is a continuity of thought and a starting point.** Reading and discussing such threads rekindles our joy in the Lord and gives us a firm grasp of the Scriptural reasons leading to our conclusions. It thus serves to unify the church in both methodology (the reasoning process) and in doctrine (what the Bible teaches). Gathering around the Word, reading Scripture together and discussing it objectively,² is one of the primary means of fellowship for God's people.³ [see Means of Grace]

2. Considering objectively the Bible or issue itself, not my experiences or feelings about it.

3. Because **Christians tend to adopt the attitudes and ways of thinking of the culture they have been imprinted with** (as in the US and the area of the country, and the particular subculture of the church they were raised in, or attached themselves to), they often aren't sensitive either to what God says or to how He feels about certain things (marriage, giving, meditation, etc.). In other words, **as a group they perpetuate error** - theological and methodological as well as moral and methodological [how they handle situations, as in ignoring, rationalizing, and neglecting ethical issues **by failing to hold one another accountable**].

I think you're onto something there ... the desire of God is something that Christians should not suffer great division over. The vernacular may change, but His sovereignty, love, holiness, and justice should be common to all who call him Lord. E

New converts start off in the condition of having been and being molded by the world. Transformation from within is a process and the means is, in part, the renewing of the mind (**Rom.12:2**). Renewing our minds has to do with rebuilding the framework that forms our interpretive grid through learning from the Scriptures, renewal in knowledge (**Col.3:10**). It involves **a change in our whole being - believing, thinking, desiring, living**. Being *renewed in the spirit of your mind* (**Eph.4:23**) is in contrast to *the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart, v.17-18*. It is hearing Christ and being taught by Him because *truth is in Jesus, v.21*.

Renewing our minds also has to do with what we focus on that keeps us straight and our longing for God strong, *set your mind on things above* (**Col.3:2**). *To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace* (**Rom.8:6**). These passages are discussing **how we can live [unto Christ]** in the corrupt world and not be of it (ie, part of it – influenced; defeated by incorporation).

RENEWING OUR MINDS BY READING AND DISCUSSING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER

Last weekend we visited Char's folks in Ohio. On the way, she read through the first 3 chapters of Ephesians out loud, in the New Living Bible. We had certain issues in mind as she read through. One set of questions was, **Does the Scripture teach that the church replaces Israel**. Is it new and separate, or is it the fulfillment of the promises to the fathers? This was on our minds because I had been working on Replacement Theology. That read-through and discussion was helpful in reaching a conclusion. Such an exercise would certainly be one helpful way to get people into the Bible and a good means to get them started thinking about God's Word the right way.

Acts 17:11 gives a clue as to how to proceed. Paul delivered the same Gospel about Christ he did elsewhere. *Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so*. In other words, they compared particular teachings of Paul about Jesus being the Christ with specific passages in the Old Testament. Even though they had never been taught or thought of the Scriptures in this way, many came to faith in Christ, **v.12**. The Spirit of God worked a change of heart and mind through their honest efforts to learn the truth.

Most growing churches eventually develop the problem of maintaining all kinds of programs and neglecting [moving away from] things that are most fundamental [Christians really do want to learn, see <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2009/01/a-theology-of-indifference/comment-page-1/#comment-16168>]. **Fundamentals** tend to get left behind and **purposes** skewed in the growth and progression of a ministry. Therefore, prudence calls for fundamentals and purposes to be identified [and clarified] and that list as well as ministry practices needs to be reexamined yearly in light of them and in light of current and emerging assaults against the truth.⁴

Doctrinal ignorance and error abound in the church and new strains (often the resurgence of old errors) assault it constantly [one reason a thorough knowledge of church history is important, especially for the leadership]. Each of us has been influenced and absorbed or picked up specific interpretations of Scripture, ways of thinking about it, and predispositions toward it. We are not of the same mind with regard to certain aspects of various teachings or practices and we are loosely connected. Yet, despite the differences [in our ways and incorporated in our thinking], by reading and discuss-

sing Scripture together through the means of comparing the different views [or aspects of them, bits and pieces - not whole theological systems] with the Scriptures, we open the possibility of **forming a stronger union**. This is a radically different approach than that usually taken either to enable people to deal with Scripture or to bring into the open and clarify differences in understanding. It is usually handled by indoctrination [through teaching and preaching], which assumes correctness on the part of the instructor(s) [one of the reasons there are so many discrepancies in the first place]. Typically, the whole question of incongruity of belief within a church body is not directly confronted because of **fear of causing divisions**. But poor Bible reading/study skills, ignorance, and error are widespread and the divisions already exist. There is no reason for the people of Christ to fear exposing interpretive disagreements to the light of the Scriptures [as long as force of personality or strength of conviction are not used to drive and overwhelm people].⁵ It is one area that cleaning up our own house will equip us to better repel the barrage of error against us. **There can be no common purpose until there is substantial purity and unity within the church community.**

4. This raises the question, Exactly **how do we evaluate current ministries?** High attendance and enthusiasm are not necessarily accurate gauges of effective ministry.

5. This approach is intended for people who do not have a **developed theological framework and need help and encouragement in reading and understanding the Bible as part of the overall goal of refocusing their hearts**. Though more difficult, it could be useful even for those with strong theological convictions if done in the right spirit. Notice that **our primary means is not indoctrination, but observation**. We are not piling on passages to strong-arm people into our viewpoint or putting people on the spot to defend a position. We are identifying perspectives and bearing them in mind as they are touched upon in an overall reading. We are not trying to teach through the passage, jump all over the Bible to prove a point, or deal with a lot of issues each session, just a few. **Correction is always a delicate process, but just because it must be done carefully is no reason for not making the effort.**