

"PREACH THE WORD"¹

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Introduction

Faculty, Board, students, friends and supporters of Mid-America Reformed Seminary: I have considered it a privilege to be associated with the Seminary this past year as Visiting Professor of Theology, and I look forward to another year, Lord willing, in this same position.

As a seminary, Mid-America occupies a strategic place as an institution that exists for the training of men for the ministry in the church of Christ. Already at the beginning of the seminary catalog, it is clearly stated that "Mid-America exists because of, and for the sake of, the preaching of the gospel."²

Moreover, since Mid-America is not tied to any particular denomination but exists to implement its vision for the pulpit among a variety of church communions making use of the seminary; it can therefore offer a theological education that is primarily based upon a confessional allegiance rather than a mere denominational loyalty. Our commitment to the *Three Standards of Unity* (the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, and the *Canons of Dort*), together with the *Westminster Standards*, promotes "genuine theological vigor and prevents denominational provincialism."³

So I commend not only the founders and supporters of this seminary for their vision as to the place of the seminary in Christ's kingdom, but I commend you students who have likewise seen this vision and have come to us in faith in order to be thoroughly trained in the Reformed faith for the ministry of the Word of God; and who

¹This is the text of an address given at the Convocation of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, August, 1991.

²*Mid-America Reformed Seminary: Biennial Catalog, 1991-1993* (Orange City, IA: Mid-America Reformed Seminary, [1991]), 8.

³*Mid-America Journal of Theology: Biennial Catalog, 1991-1993*, 9.

therefore as "workmen will not need to be ashamed but who correctly handle the Word of truth," as the apostle Paul puts it in 2 Timothy 2:15.

I wish to make my address a message which is based upon the Word of God. So I have chosen for my text 2 Timothy 4:1-8 as the passage of Scripture and, specifically, verse 2 of this passage as the focus of my address. For it calls to our attention the purpose for which Mid-America exists; namely, to prepare men to be preachers of the gospel, the good news about the unsearchable riches of God's grace to the descendants of Adam's fallen race.

The apostle Paul, as he tells us in verse 7, had "fought the good fight, he had finished the race, he had kept the faith." Now the time had come for his departure from this earthly life and for his receiving of his heavenly inheritance in the presence of Christ his Lord and Savior whom he had so faithfully served during the eventful years of his turbulent ministry.

The torch of truth, like a divine deposit (*παροθήκη*, 2 Tim. 1:14), was being passed on to Timothy and to the men of his generation. As Paul and his generation had been faithful in their time, so Timothy and his generation would be required to be faithful in their time. For the Lord's servants may come and go as he directs them to places of his appointment, but he himself and his imperishable Word continually abide.

Paul wanted Timothy to be fully aware of this and therefore in our text he gives his young colleague this final charge: "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching."

Our text not only contains a charge but in it the aged apostle also tells Timothy why and how, and to what end this divine deposit, the Word, is to be preached. Let us therefore give this text our attention, for it is still as relevant today and for this occasion as it was when it was first given by the apostle Paul.

Why the Word is to be preached

Because it contains God's remedy for man's need

Simply put, the Word is to be preached because it contains God's remedy for man's sin, his salvation, and service. The old Reformation catechism, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, is divided into three major sections: *sin* (the nature of it and its consequences); *salvation* (what God

has done in Christ to save lost mankind); *service* (how God's people are to live in gratitude to God for his so-great salvation in Christ).

The *Heidelberg Catechism*, as you may have noticed, is simply following the order of salvation that the apostle Paul unfolds in his grand epistle to the Romans: chapters 1-3: all have sinned, Jew and Gentile alike, and fall short of the glory (the righteous requirements) of God; chapters 4-11: there is now no condemnation but, rather, full redemption for all who are united to Christ in saving faith; chapters 12-16: as a consequence, present your bodies (and lives) as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable (*λογικήν*, Rom. 12:1) service. For, all of life is to be thankfully dedicated to God as an act of worship.

Paul also speaks about this same Word of God as a means of grace here in 2 Timothy. Already in the context of the preceding chapter in which our text is found (2 Tim. 3:15-17), he calls attention to the Word of God as a divine means of grace: for salvation and for service.

For salvation

Timothy's salvation is specifically in view when Paul says, "And that from childhood you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (v. 15).

As spiritual heirs of the Reformed branch of the Reformation, we stand in the tradition of those, such as Zwingli, Calvin, and Knox who correctly saw the covenant emphasis in the Word of God. They correctly saw that God is a God of his people and their children in their generations. Of course this means that children must be taught in the ways of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), that they must be born again by the Spirit of God, and that they must confess their faith and take their active place within the ranks of the church as God's people. This is already indicated by the parents when, at the baptismal font, their covenant vows include doing the utmost in their power to instruct and see that their children are instructed in the ways of the Lord.

But of course, all of this follows as a consequence of the Lord's initiative in saving and bringing his people unto himself in redeeming love, for a biblical truth that we sincerely believe and confess is that, "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jon. 2:9). Hence, our confidence and trust in doing the utmost in our power to train up our covenant children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord in grateful response to the gracious initiative of God's faithfulness and love.

Timothy was a covenant child. No doubt he fully came to know the Lord in an active way when as a young man he heard Paul's preaching on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1ff.) and soon thereafter became his colleague. But his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois (2 Tim. 1:5), had earlier faithfully taught him from infancy the Holy Scriptures "which are able to make one wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

For the Scriptures contain God's holy history of redemption; from creation, to the fall, to the coming of the promised Redeemer, Christ, in the fullness of God's own time. And let us be sure to recognize that it is *actual* history, not mythology or packaging of one sort or another. For it is a record of the *magnalia Dei* (the great deeds of God, Acts 2:11) for his people's redemption. Scripture, therefore, is nothing less than the God-breathed (θεόπνευστος, 2 Tim. 3:16) divine Word which man needs to hear and heed in order to be saved.

Hence, in the charge given to Timothy—and to all who like him have been called by God to be preachers of the Word—this charge to "*preach the Word*" includes covenant children who, from earliest years of childhood, are to be instructed in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, all the while trusting that God will open their hearts to him in his own time, as he did with Timothy and with countless other covenant children right up to the present time.

For fruitful living

But in the second place, the Word of God is also necessary as a guide to holy, fruitful living, for the apostle goes on to say, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (vv. 16-17). There are both positive and negative aspects by which this is to be understood.

The Psalmist regarded God's Word as a lamp to his feet and a light for his path (Ps. 119:105), exposing as it does the mire of sin and the potholes of stumbling. The prophet Jeremiah correctly assessed man's situation when he observed, "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). Hence, the need for the Word of God to provide chart and compass if the child of God is to walk in ways which please him. And as walking in ways which please the Lord ever leads to a closer relationship and increasing likeness to his image, the destiny of his people is therefore

not only to be with him where he is but also to be like him, fully mature in Christlikeness and fully qualified and equipped for every good word and work.

And since Christ our exalted Lord is King, he claims (in the words of Abraham Kuyper) every inch of this world's territory for himself. So his people are to be busily engaged in bringing his dominion to expression on all of life's terrains, whether in evangelism and missions, but also in the shop, on the farm, in the home, the office, the school, or market place. What a grand vision the Lord gives his people as he guides them by his Word and Spirit in paths of holy, fruitful living.

Because it is the antidote to sin's poison

Sinful practices

Negatively, the Word is also the antidote to the poison of sin. In the preceding context of 2 Timothy 3:15-17, the apostle warns against the increasing godlessness of this age which was already manifesting itself in his time (cf. vv. 1ff.). The catalog of sins enumerated here sounds like a current description of the lawless actions of modern, autonomous man in our secular society—full of himself and his own selfish pursuits.

Notice in verse 2 the sins which threaten the family. Here we are told that people will be abusive, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving. People who do not love God do not love their neighbors, and their closest neighbors of course are the members of their family.

Notice in verse 4 the idolatrous pursuit of pleasure and material things. People will be lovers of money rather than being lovers of God. Their short-term goal will be to make it to the next weekend when for them living begins once again. But what bondage their way of life reveals! They are unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good (v. 3), even when their cultural veneer expresses itself in a hypocritical form of godliness, but of course without its power (v. 5). How like himself the Devil makes his captives.

People who don't know the Lord—or who turn away from him—can only get worse, till one wonders how much even of the corrupted image of God can be left in the face of such increasing lawlessness and brutality?

We live in a time of increasing evidence that the world at large, at an accelerating pace, seeks to do without the true God, the God who has revealed himself in his Son and in his Word. But a Scripture

passage like this one makes it prophetically clear that he is still in control and that, ultimately, divine judgment is coming. Hence, also, the warning to the people of God, "From such turn away" (v. 5).

Does this mean, avoid all contact with such sinners so that one doesn't even concern oneself with their evangelization? Obviously, this is not the case. All mankind, even hardened sinners, are to be confronted with the claims of the gospel. Those who spurn the gift of new life in Christ are left without excuse in the day of the revelation of God's wrath and judgment.

What Paul is therefore warning about here is: don't identify with the sinful practices of the ungodly. For one doesn't reach sinners by becoming like them. This only earns their mockery and contempt. The way sinners are to be reached is by pointing them to Christ as he is presented in the preaching of the gospel, and by being a model of consistent Christian conduct.

False doctrine

The next thing that the apostle warns about is false doctrine (vv. 6-9). We must appreciate the fact that false doctrine is a leading cause, and not just a consequence, of ecclesiastical and social defection. And this defection is aided and abetted by people being seduced and led astray by teaching that is contrary to the truth of God's Word. Paul refers here to teachers of error who "worm their way into homes. . ." (v. 6). This almost sounds like the cults who come to our door with their home-made religions. When Paul adds that they "gain control over weak-willed women," he is not denigrating women as though they are lesser mortals than men. What he recognizes is that when false teachers (cultists) come to the door of the home, they most likely meet the lady of the home first. And among their number will be some who fall under the influence of their false teaching. But where such homes are not grounded in the truth of God's Word, it is altogether likely that there will also be a number of weak-willed husbands who follow the same pathway of being led astray too.

False teaching today assumes more subtle forms than cultism only. False teaching is also the cause of evil practices in morality and ethics. False teaching says, if it's fun, do it; after all, you owe it to yourself. If pregnancy is the consequence, false teaching says, the unborn fetus is only a blob of tissue, or a woman has the right over her own body, and so, get rid of the unwanted fetus. For to do so is not murder, or if anyone claims that it is, never mind, it is in any case justifiable

termination of life. But even if this euphemism is used, it is still *murder!*

Tomorrow, false teaching will say that euthanasia is only helping the helpless to die with dignity. So, pull the plug, or give that hopelessly sick or aged person a lethal injection. In that way you will be doing him/her a favor, and yourself one too, for then you'll be rid of him/her. So the right to die today becomes the duty to die tomorrow.

If the folly of false teaching (v. 9) is to become clear at all, let alone to everyone, it will only be so where the clear ethical, as well as doctrinal, teaching of God's Word is seen and unashamedly proclaimed once again. Hence, the relevance of our text, "Preach the Word!"

How the Word is to be preached

The minister is a man under orders from his divine King

The task of a herald

Our text makes clear that the minister is a man under orders from his divine King. For when it says, "Preach the Word," the word for preach is the imperative verb, κηρῶσον, the noun of which is κηρῶξ, or herald. Preaching therefore is the work of someone the King has called to be his herald. That means that he doesn't come to people with his own message, but rather, with the message of another, his King.

So he doesn't have to be original, or rack his brains in order to present something novel or entertaining. Rather, he is only required to be faithful, i.e., to pass on to his hearers exactly what the King wants his subjects to hear. And wouldn't you expect that this would be the case where the King has given his message in his Word? Therefore, the contents of this message must be *faithfully* proclaimed. This then should also make apparent the fact that adequate training in order to do so must first be obtained from a seminary that is properly qualified to give such training.

Moreover, the King gives his herald, the minister, the authority that the Word of the King inherently has. So the herald does not come with his, "I think"; or "It might be a good idea"; or "May I suggest"; or even "Let me share with you. . . ." For it is not his message nor his ideas that he is bringing to God's people. It is nothing less than the King's Word, and therefore the herald proclaims "Thus says the Lord!" This means that, while proper listening may thus be your hearers' responsibility, to proclaim that Word properly will be your responsibility. Hence, be faithful in the way that you do it.

The snares to be avoided by the minister

Our text next tells us that such faithfulness will include a ministry of the Word that is ἐκκαιρως, ἀκαιρως (in season, out of season). What does this mean, that perhaps there may be times when presenting the gospel may not be suitable? We all know what it's like to be victims of verbal exploitation from people who "bash" us with their own particular sales pitch, religious or otherwise.

Therefore, while we must remember that we cannot force the gospel down people's throats, for this only creates adverse reaction and resentment; we must also realize that the Evil One will always try to make it seem as though there is never a really suitable time for presenting the gospel. Isn't it a constant temptation to be silent even when the Lord gives us obvious opportunities to witness, whether it be at a hospital bedside, or in casual conversation with neighbors or work-mates, or during a lunch break, or even in properly handling a problem with our children?

In the pulpit the temptation will be "to trim sail," to avoid the risk of giving people what they need to hear if in doing so we might offend them. It's so easy to rationalize and temporize by regarding the present time as inopportune, thus putting the matter off till later, but in doing so, finding that the more opportune time never comes. Moreover, it's so easy to get involved in lesser things, to be side-tracked by neglecting the number one priority. And so the apostle forewarns Timothy, "Be ready to preach the Word whether you think it timely or not, for doing this faithfully is your number one priority."

The next three imperative verbs of our text further point out how the Word is to be preached.

The first, ἐλεγξον, means to reprove or to correct. While it may be difficult at times to do this, we must recognize that it is not just children who need correction, but adults as well who may be guilty of wandering away from the Lord's paths. Therefore, the Word, like a tuning fork, as it is preached should strike the right pitch that will bring about the proper response from hearers once again to attune their lives to the will of God.

The next imperative, ἐπιτιμησον, means to rebuke, and this may at times be even more difficult than to reprove. But as Calvin reminds us, "If we were as teachable as we should be, Christ's ministers could guide

us merely by pointing out the right way.⁴ As it is, we're not as teachable as we should be; consequently the preacher will oftentimes need to call a spade a spade, as Jesus did with the Pharisees and Paul does repeatedly, here and in his other epistles. As Calvin once again puts it, "For the people, constant diligence means to stir up those who are asleep, to stop those who are rushing headlong in the wrong way, and to put right the things that concern the vain world."⁵

The third imperative in our text is *παρακάλεσον*, which means to encourage. The related noun of this verb is *παρακλήσις*, the name Jesus gave to the Holy Spirit, the Divine Helper or Advocate whom he was to give his church as his replacement (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7-11). In these Scripture passages, our Lord points out the ministry of the Spirit in ways which are consistent with this word's rich and varied meaning in the original, so that it may be translated as Helper, Comforter, Encourager, Advocate. For the Spirit's ministry is one of teaching, bearing witness to the truth, pointing people savingly to Christ, interceding in prayer on their behalf, bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God, giving true comfort and encouragement indeed.

In the same way the undershepherd of Christ has the task to be a "son of encouragement" (the name Barnabas means *υἱὸς παρακλήσεως*, Son of Encouragement, Acts 4:36), for the lost need finding, the enslaved need to be liberated, the dead need life, the burdened need the Great Burden-bearer (Matt. 11:28); in a word, the sin-sick need the wholeness of salvation that only Christ can give. How else, then, can we really be encouragers of God's people without the gospel? Thank God, his Word is an adequate means of grace. Therefore, as our text goes on to add, preach it faithfully "with great patience and careful instruction" (*ἐν πίσσῃ μακροθυμίᾳ καὶ διδοχαί*).

Let us again have Calvin tell us why the apostle puts these two terms together: "Those who are strong only in fervor and sharpness, but are not fortified with sound doctrine. . . make a great noise, rave. . . but make no headway because they build without foundation."⁶ Calvin is

⁴*The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and The Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 333.

⁵*The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and The Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 333.

⁶*The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and The Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 333.

reminding us of the fact that people will not be won to the truth merely by scolding them. Coupled with careful instruction must go great patience and love—in the same way that our heavenly Father deals with us as his children.

The work the King has commissioned his servant to do

What it is not

Paul speaks of this in the context of our text where he reminds Timothy, "Discharge all the duties of your ministry" (v. 5). And what are they? Let us first point out what they are not. Being a janitor, taxi driver, all-purpose committee chairman, or even social worker are honorable tasks and have their place—sometimes even for the minister in the discharge of his busy round of activity. But these things are not the principal things of the minister's calling. Remember, though waiting on tables is an honorable task, the apostles put others in charge of this diaconal work in order that they might give themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4). These are your principal priorities, too, for which God has called you. Try to steer clear of things that other people can do in order that you may be free to do the things that your King has called and commissioned you to do.

What it is

Let us spell out somewhat further what is involved in the work of "fulfilling your ministry." The call of the church (which one day you hope to get) will list a number of things as your work—preaching, visiting, catechizing, etc., which may be gathered into two main categories found in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20); namely, evangelism and nurture.

Nurture

The concept of nurture is certainly at the fore here in Paul's charge to Timothy. Only as the people of God are given a balanced diet, not only of milk (1 Pet. 2:2) but also of solid food from the Word of God (Heb. 5:12-14), will they be able to discern and resist error, overcome the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil, and grow up to the maturity of Christlikeness. Hence, faithfully feed the flock of God which the Chief Shepherd purchased with his own precious blood. Spurgeon says somewhere, "Sheep that are not fed soon begin to devour one another." Therefore, feed the flock from the Word of God

by means of your preaching, teaching, catechizing, counseling and visiting in the discharge of a faithful ministry.

Moreover, resist the temptation to neglect visiting your flock, even though their mobility and the demands of your crowded schedule are increasingly great. Perhaps it is not as true now as it once was that, to put it in the words of an old Puritan, "a home-going pastor makes a church-going people." Nevertheless, it is still true that the minister who is invisible during the week will probably be incomprehensible to his flock on Sunday. A faithful ministry will mean knowing the sheep by name, being aware of their problems and struggles; things that are only properly learned by personal visiting and contact with each member of the flock.

Evangelism

Paul specifically mentions "doing the work of an evangelist" (ἔργον ποιῆσον ἐναγγελιστοῦ, v. 5). We need not at this point go into detail about the original meaning of the term, evangelist, i.e., were evangelists helpers of the apostles in the discharge of an itinerant ministry? Be that as it may, the term still conveys an all-important aspect of the church's ministry which is abidingly reflected in the Great Commission. After all, discipling the nations precedes teaching them to observe all that the Lord has commanded.

There may be different methods to employ in evangelistic endeavor but there is no easy way to do the exacting work of evangelism. It is a case of dedication to the task of continual outreach. But when all has been said and done, the beginning and continued success of evangelism lies in the faithful preaching of the Word. After all, we may sow and water but only God in his sovereignty can and does bless his Word and give the increase. Let us then be faithful in sowing and watering, believing that in the abundant sowing there is also an increase in gathering (2 Cor. 9:6); all the while recognizing that by such means the Lord brings his own elect savingly to himself in Christ.

To what end (or result) this ministry of the Word?

Is it for human acclaim or plaudits?

The lingering vice

Is there perhaps some room for this in the statement of the apostle, "Keep your head in all situations" (Σὺ δὲ νῆφε ἐν πάντων, v. 5)? It must be admitted that there is the temptation "to play to the audience" in

our ministry, especially in our preaching. Augustine is supposed to have said that to want human approval is the last vice of a good man. How tailor-made the pastor's ministry and preaching can be to this vice. He is a leader; he's respected by his flock; and he can soon make his preaching an ego trip. And after the worship service, as he stands at the door to greet his people, he can bask in the sunshine of their praise—judging the success of his sermon by the applause meter! It is no wonder that another Puritan divine, in considering this ministerial vanity, was prompted to write an essay entitled, "Can A Minister Be Saved?" Thank God that, since all things are possible with him, even ministers can be saved!

The need for a balanced attitude

Obviously, however, what the apostle is referring to here relates to other things: to the difficult times he warns about, and to the weighty work the minister is called to do, even to the endurance of hardship when and if necessary. Being mindful of these things will require a sober, balanced attitude (hence, *wise*, which means to be sober-minded or balanced). Even more, it will require dedication and commitment which the realization that a call from the King gives.

Be ready for results which may surprise, if not disappoint

The predisposition toward declension from the faith

This predisposition toward declension from the faith emerges in the things mentioned by the apostle in vv. 3-4. But as we look at them, are we inclined to regard them as a similar, if not identical description of people he has already mentioned and warned about in chapter 3:1-4? Why then are they mentioned again at this point? A closer examination, however, reveals that in the earlier description and warning, the apostle is concerned about godlessness that is present in the world and false teaching that may invade the church from outside the church. In chapter 4:3-4, he now warns about declension from the faith and apostasy that will arise from within the church. Here he describes people who no longer wish to hear sound doctrine (because it is "boring, the old stuff we've heard before, irrelevant?") and who therefore deliberately turn aside to teachers who introduce error, both new and old.

Why do churches and people in them depart from the faith? Scripture is abundant in referring to its historical actuality in Israel's

case. But the church of Christ, despite the greater abundance it has received of God's grace, has no cause for complacency or smugness. Jude in his epistle warns the church about the threat of apostasy, and the exalted Christ himself warns churches in Asia of this same doleful predisposition and development (Rev. 2-3).

It should not be difficult to see why apostasy is an ever-present threat. After all, it is so easy to be a mere hearer of the Word. In Ezekiel's day the people came to hear his words and he was "to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them" (Ezek. 33:32). In the same way a minister's sermon can be evaluated by the hearers as an art form and his delivery as a performance, and even if such may be judged as impressive, it is still no indication that the hearers are prepared to respond in obedience to what has been heard. Hence, James' warning, "But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22).

Moreover, since a Christian's required walk by faith is a constant battle against the temptations of failing to trust the Lord, there is the ever-present desire to walk by seeing, to seek security in tangible realities, to choose one's own preferred way rather than accepting the Lord's often less than pleasant way, as far as the flesh is concerned.

Furthermore, it's easy to let the warmth of our love for the Lord cool off, if not grow cold altogether. And the pathway of this action is so easy to follow, i.e., neglect reading the Word, let one's devotional life slip if not lapse, increasingly make worship services a mere formality; all of which are part of the recipe which produces spiritual shipwreck.

Principiis obsta (resist beginnings)

In our day compromising the truth of God's Word is a particular temptation toward apostasy. It usually begins by limiting the extent of its inspiration and authority, especially as it applies to the field of science. This means that an obscuring and adapting of its message must take place. Texts on a given situation about which Scripture was formerly regarded as clear, such as the women in office issue or homosexuality, are now made questionable by the employment of so-called macro-coordinates, i.e., terms such as love or equality which are interpreted as presenting the sweep of Scripture, and which then are played off against the clear data of specific texts, referred to as micro-coordinates, in order to put their clear teaching in doubt. It is not hard

to see that this form of "new hermeneutic" can be employed to change the meaning of Scripture, and nullify its message and authority.

The remedy our text enjoins to all this is: "Preach the Word," and by this of course is meant the whole counsel of God. Don't allow anyone or anything to undermine your faith in its plenary inspiration, its truth, and its authority. For, when the termites of compromise and unbelief are once allowed to begin their work on the foundation, the inevitable end is the ruin and collapse of the whole building. The declension of some formerly strong Reformed churches in Holland, and before that, the decline of the church in Germany in the face of a higher critical approach to Scripture, are cases in point of what happens when Scripture is undermined by rationalism and higher criticism.

A typical example of this may be seen in a recent book written by a German theologian, Helmut Groos. The book, *Christlicher Glaube und intellektuelles Gewissen* (i.e., *Christian Faith and the Intellectual Conscience*).⁷ In it he first parades the views of theologians and philosophers who consider the teachings of Christianity as no longer compatible with the naturalistic conclusions of science and the rationalistic "maturity" of modern man who has come of age in today's world.

Then, instead of challenging this unbelief, Groos goes on to make extensive use of such modern theologians as Ebeling, Fuchs, Bultmann, Grass, etc., to maintain that all of Christianity's major tenets may be successfully challenged as unhistorical. Jesus was only a Jewish rabbi (an unusual teacher perhaps) who was crucified but did not die in atonement for sin, he did not rise from the dead, he is not coming again, there will not be a new heaven and earth, and no glorification of the believer in ultimate resurrection glory. For all these "dogmas" belong to the theological developments made by the early church in response to its *Sitz im Leben*; the basis for such development being legendary and mythical rather than historical and factual. After he is finished jettisoning the foundations of Christianity, Groos goes on consistently to point out that the tenets of the Christian ethic are also open to challenge.⁸

Is there anything left then for worthwhile living? His conclusion is: "Even though the world is basically cold and merciless, the realist may experience the good, the beautiful and lovely as a piece of reality that

⁷Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987.

⁸*Christlicher Glaube*, 409

makes life worthwhile.⁹ In other words, even though there is no real basis for doing so, be a humanistic realist who still places value upon the good and beautiful things which life may have to offer—because there's nothing more than this anyway. How unutterably sad and tragic! But Groos has done us a favor by pointing out the logical end of questioning God's Word which begins with the serpent's question, "Did God really say?" (Gen. 3:1).

The remedy

Thank God, there is still an antidote to all of this skeptical and futile nonsense! Our Lord still honors his Word where it is faithfully preached. Only, let us not succumb to compromise, despair, and apostasy. At the time of the Reformation, the Lord raised up Luther and the reformers who returned God's people to the Word, and as a result the Lord gave the church new life.

Where the Word is faithfully preached and disseminated today, churches all over the world are growing. By way of confirmation of this, let me give you a few examples which appeared recently in an Australian religious magazine: every hour four hundred conversions to an evangelical faith are taking place in Latin America; every day, despite official state repression, a new Protestant church is opened in communist China; in former communist countries of eastern Europe, including Albania, the church is growing; in Africa as a whole, Christians have grown from five million to two hundred million this century and the church is out-pacing population growth; in South Korea, millions of people continue to become Christians.¹⁰

Conclusion

Let us be as faithful in our day as the apostle Paul was in his. At the end he could say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (vv. 7-8).

Talk about vindication—what could be better than to have the Lord's own approval upon one's ministry at the end?

⁹*Christlicher Glaube*, 434.

¹⁰*The Australian Evangelical*, July-September, 1988.

Talk about reward—what could be better than the eternal rewards the Lord alone can and will give his people on the great day of his glorious return!

Let us then heed the apostolic charge, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: *Preach the Word*”—without fear, favor, or compromise! For God still blesses it wherever it is faithfully proclaimed.

By God’s grace, this is what we at Mid-America are committed to do, and to keep on doing.

May God bless our efforts to this end in the coming year ahead.

May all of our students become faithful heralds of their King and ours—the Lord Jesus Christ!