

To a Closet Calvinist

After years of struggling through school, seminary, small pastorates, long hours of study, part-time jobs to earn a meager subsistence for your family, you have finally become well established in a sizeable church, a comfortable pastorium with a good salary.

Your personal sacrifice is to be commended, and you have good reason to believe that the Lord has rewarded your persistent and diligent pursuit of your calling. God is certainly to be praised for the measure of “rest” He has given you.

I am, however, disturbed by a recent report from a mutual friend of ours. He tells me that in a recent conversation with you, that you not only affirmed our friendship, but that you shared with me common theological beliefs. “Do you then preach the doctrines of grace in your church?” our friend asked. “No,” was the reply he reported, “because the people of our church cannot bear that truth.”

There has been a considerable proliferation of crypto-Calvinists in recent years. Numerous sovereign grace conferences, republication of Puritan literature, and even a Southern Baptist “Founder’s Conference” whose stated purpose is to bring Southern Baptists back to their Calvinistic roots, have all contributed to put before thinking men’s minds the Bible doctrine of free grace. Therefore, many prominent pastors and evangelists have begun to privately claim to believe this truth, but for reasons through to be honorable have elected to conceal their faith from the public. In fact, it has become a position of prestige to claim the intellectual powers to grasp and embrace such “high doctrine” of the historic Christian faith, yet have the wisdom and compassion to refrain from “hurting” the current religious establishment.

Now, this has suddenly gripped my heart as a very tragic turn of events, especially in your case. That your keen mind, your clear comprehension of vital truth, your fine gifts of communication, should be sold to preaching less than the most excellent of gospel truth seems a crime against God’s goodness. This is not ignorance on your part. You know! God has revealed it to you. It is nothing less than wicked suppression of truth (Romans 1:18).

I remember your college days when your determination to expose heresy taught in classes, and to uproot liberalism, was constantly getting you into hot water. I remember the zeal and fervor with which you hungrily pursued truth, earnestly sought true spiritual life, preached and proclaimed it without fear of man or organization. I also remember the ostracization and economic hazard it brought you. But you were neither ashamed of the gospel or of those your brothers in the faith who preached it. Your method and zeal may have been those of a novice, but your heart was that of a saint and a prophet.

I do not know when you decided that it was expedient for you to omit the God-glorifying core of free grace from the salvation message. Perhaps it was in one of your pastorates while in seminary that you found out that the old wine skin could not stand the new wine. A dwindling attendance, murmuring rebels, butting goats, the hostile glare of a venerable, blue-haired WMU president, and a deacon’s meeting to discuss dismissing the preacher can put a great amount of pressure on a young husband and father. Some sagacious seminary professor may have counseled you to be a bit more judicious in your selection of sermon material, advising against outmoded Puritan theology. You may have been seduced by Neo-Orthodoxy, the “New Hermeneutic” and had begun to water down the Bible by erroneous interpretation. At any rate, you found the going much easier and more successful when you altered your message.

It simply will not do for you to say, “my people cannot bear it”. There may be some validity in avoiding doctrines centering around divine election and predestination when preaching to the lost. They cannot appreciate these truths and will only use them as an excuse to put off obedience. But if such truth cannot be preached to the Christian church, who can hear it? It must be designated a part of the Bible, that we, like arrogant Romanists, must keep out of the hands of the “common people”. Paul refutes that false idea. *“Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect” “. . . the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Corinthians 2:6-7).*

If you protest that your people are not yet prepared to receive such, when do you think they will be? It seems you have had time enough to do that if you intend to ever do it.

Perhaps you are telling yourself that you are “being all things to all men that you might by all means win some”. Paul did indeed alter his life-style, put aside, or embraced his ethnic religious culture . . . even put himself under legal bondage to gain a hearing. But he never cheapened the gospel. He never gave a fraction of an inch when the gospel was at stake. That would have defeated and denied his purpose. A gospel so acceptable it will not offend its hearers neither merits nor needs such personal sacrifices.

What have we gained if we lower the gospel to gain a hearing? We must choose between less gospel for more people and more gospel for less people. If the first denies the children bread necessary for spiritual growth, the second will in no wise diminish the *number of the children (John 6:37)*, though it may thin out the total audience.

Are you afraid of “offending little ones (Luke 17:2)? A worthy caution. The Lord has so warned us. But this hardly extends to continually withholding truth. We are told of they who fall away because of the offense of the word (Matthew 13:21). Who will dare say that they who leave the faith because of the truth are truly God” children? He that is of God hears and receives truth (John 10:26-27), 18:37). Again, some time must be granted that children may grow sufficiently to receive “strong meat”, especially if they have been taught religious lies (most have). But is that really your intention? Are you any closer to that realization than you were 5 years ago? Or are you content with feeding a diet of pabulum that doesn’t disturb the flesh, will not make waves, and will keep you in good standing with man-oriented religion? How long will it take? Have you “Christians” of 5 years, 10, 20, 30 years? When do you

expect them to be able? Will you stunt everyone because some will not grow? Perhaps they will not grow because no spiritual life is present.

If the child be not circumcised on the prescribed eighth day, each delayed day simply means more flesh to be cut away, more pain, and a longer period of recovery. Flesh does not remain dormant. It grows. Every year you put off preaching vital truth, you build up that much more false ministry that you will be obliged to tear down, if and when you do begin to proclaim the whole counsel of God. The Apostle Paul expressed his intention to go on and leave the shallow-water piddlers behind: They aren't coming . . . ever (Hebrews 5:12-6:4).

Are you called of God to proclaim His word, to make disciples, teaching them *all* things Christ taught (Matthew 28:20)? Or are you called to hold established religion together, to maintain its peace, facilitate its growth, widen its influence, power and prestige? If the first be true, the second cannot be, for established religion has never worshipped the true God. If the second be true, then you are only the local "holy man", the professional religionist who symbolizes the superstitious element in a sacral society. That makes you two notches above a witch doctor or medicine man, a cut above the parish priest, but still a thousand miles from a minister of Christ whom the world hates.

Preaching the whole counsel of God will certainly lose you your good standing among your denominational peers. It will preclude your ever being a candidate for president of your Convention. It will indeed bring upon you the violent hatred of those who love not Christ and truth. But Whom is it that is our first responsibility to please? In Whose Presence are we preaching? In Whose Sight is our ministry performed (2 Corinthians 2:17)? How shall we answer Him for willingly withholding His truth, His pasture from His sheep?

My beloved brother, I write not to condemn you but to intreat you. I urge you for the sake of your calling, your potential in the gospel, your person integrity, for the sake of all who hear you, give earnest consideration to these questions.

You owe me nothing but love. But you do have a debt to your Redeemer, your Saviour, Deliverer and King. When the impotent man made whole was confronted by established religion, they immediately sought to exercise their dominion over him. This is his answer: "He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk. I cannot obey Him and you at the same time. If you were my benefactor I might be bound to obey you. For me you have done nothing. He has done everything. I am going to obey Him." I pray that you are not so indebted to established religion that you cannot obey Christ.

It is quite true that a great many "Calvinists" today are grossly imbalanced, making a movement of a portion of our message, preaching it as if it were the total message. Intellectual pride, theological snobbery, wooden ecclesiastical deadness, fatalistic irresponsibility, are all snares to be avoided with diligence. Nor does one need to unnecessarily wave red flags, calling these truths by their most offensive names, intentionally provoking hostility. When the truths of free grace are preached clearly and developed lucidly within their scriptural context, along with human responsibility, the emphasis always resting on the glory of God, they will accomplish their true purpose of persuading the elect and hardening the rest.

I pray the Lord will make you bold for the faith, gentle for the sheep, fierce for the deceivers, and a fervent adorer of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

- C. M.