IV. Appreciating Our Responsibility for Wise Application

Taking into account our situation

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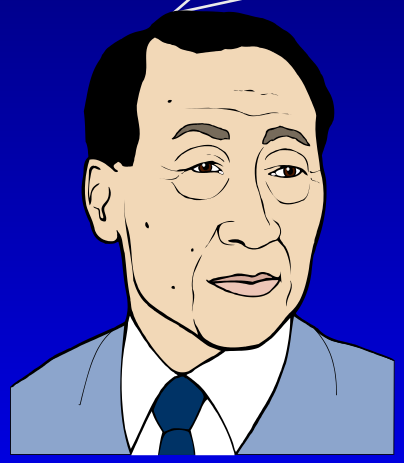
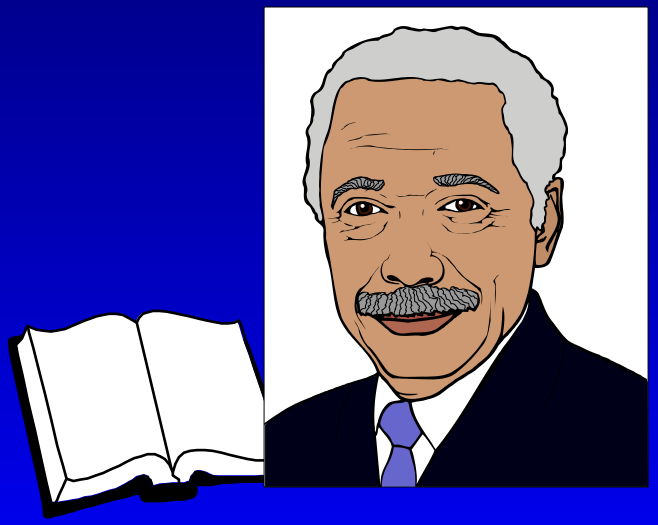
The Challenge

Sometimes I don't see how the Bible is relevant.



Let's look at modern idols.



Reading Assignments

- Required: Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* chaps. 2, 4, 5 (pp. 6-17, 43-75). (hidden agenda for church life).
- Optional:
  - Stott, *Between Two Worlds*
  - Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction*
  - Guinness, *No God but God*
  - Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*
  - Conn, "Theological Education," *WTJ* 41 (1978-79) 324-363.
  - Zens, "Building Up the Body: One Man …"

Where Are We?

1. Preliminary acquaintance with the text
2. Exegesis in the original setting
3. Relations with other passages
4. Role in redemptive history
5. **Application**

- Application stimulates other steps.

Where Are We?

1. Preliminary acquaintance with the text
2. Exegesis in the original setting
3. Relations with other passages
4. Role in redemptive history
5. **Application**

- A sense of where we are going in application can stimulate keen observation in all the other stages of research.

Implications of *Lex Christi*

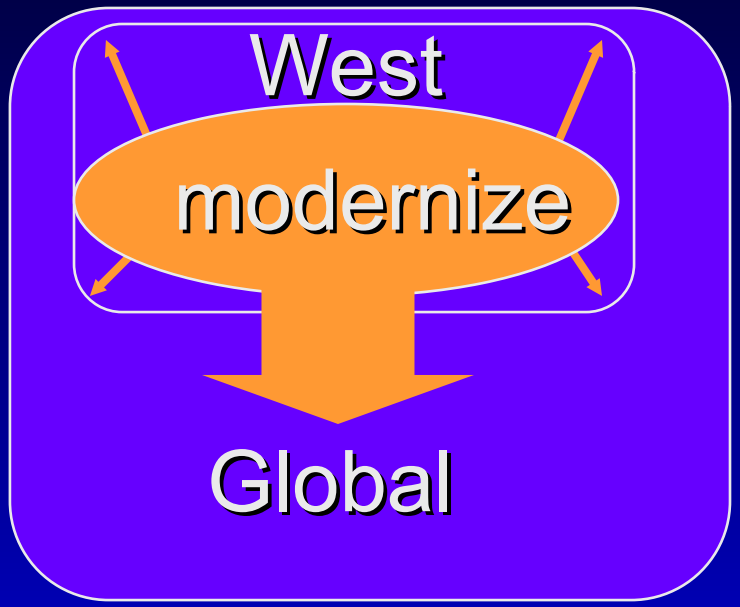
3C, 4C implies applicability of Scripture

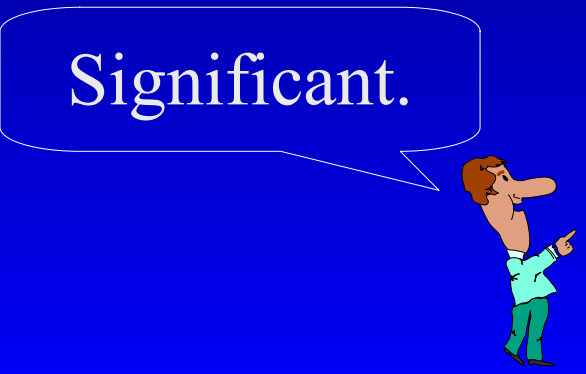
A. Discerning Cultural Idols

1. Secularization and Modernization

1. Secularization and Related Aspects of Modernization

Setting of Secularization

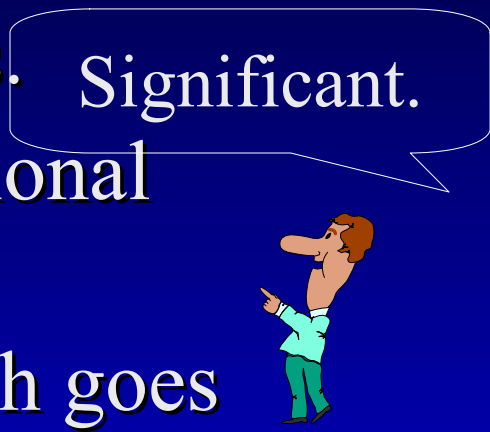




- Modernization in West.
- Penetrates other countries.
- International relevance.
- Terms: <u>secularization</u>; <u>privatization</u>, <u>pluralization</u>.
- Terms from Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File* (building on Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*).

Setting of Secularization

- Modernization is most intense in the West.
- But it penetrates into other countries.
- Hence, our reflections have international relevance.
- The key term is secularization, which goes together with privatization and pluralization.
- Terminology is found in Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File*, building on Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*.



Secularization

~~Old worship~~

New idol

Not a vacuum.

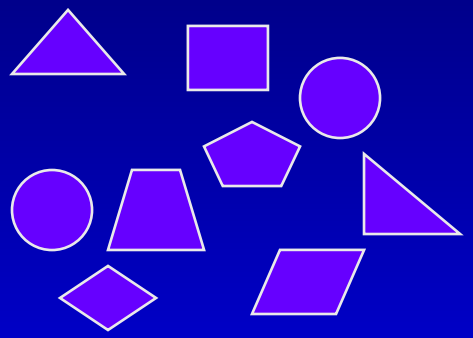
- Secularization removes force from religion.
- Comes from ideas <u>and</u> economy.
- Society has new idolatries:
  - Mammon, state power, self-fulfillment
  - Nature, humanity
- See Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction*; Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*

Secularization

- Secularization is the removal of classical, overt religion as a determining, world-defining structural force in social consciousness.
- Pressure comes not only from philosophical ideas (Schaeffer's story), but economy.
- Secularization leaves society not with no religion at all but with idolatries: Mammon, nature, humanity, state power, self-fulfillment. See Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction*.

Pluralization

- <u>Many</u> ideas compete for allegiance.
- No ideology controls the whole.
- People “shop” for a church.
- Churches “sell” themselves.



Plurality

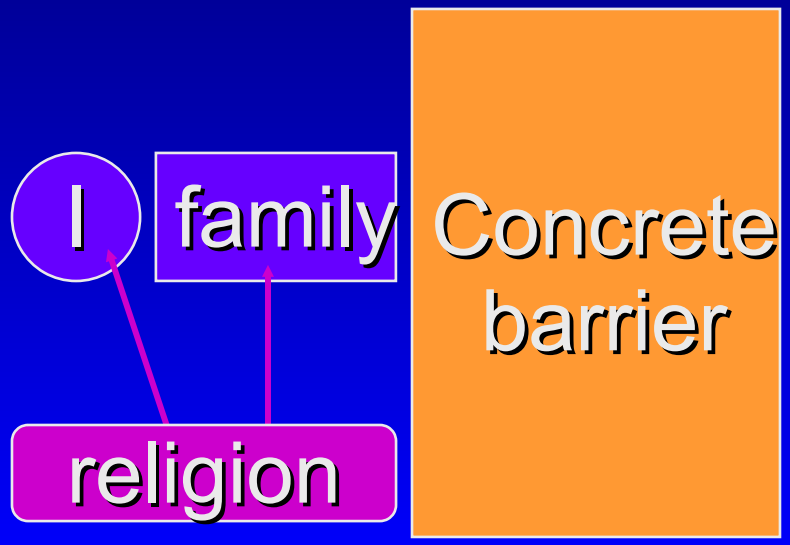
Pluralization

- Pluralization is the rise of social awareness of the fact that many religious groups and ideologies competing for ultimate allegiance.
- No religious group controls the worldview of a whole people.
- People “shop” for a church.
- Churches imitate business in order to “sell” themselves to people “shopping” for religious wares.

Distortion.

Privatization

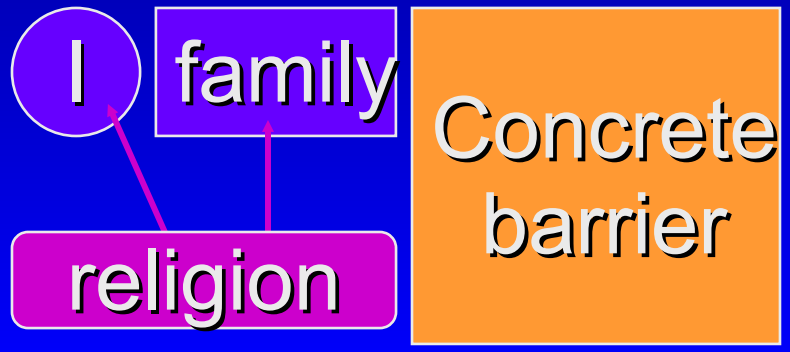
- Religion restricted to private sphere.
- Not "public":
  - science, politics, education, business, labor, art, communications



Where the action is: society, culture, knowledge, business

Privatization

- Privatization is the confinement of religious influence to narrowly delineated spheres: the family and the individual psyche.
- One must not bring up religious thinking in "public": science, politics, education, business, labor, art, communications



Where the action is: society, culture, knowledge, business

Civility

- Remaining value is politeness.
- Builds on
  - pluralization (polite to religions).
  - privatization (keep divisions private).

Civility

- The highest remaining ethical value is civility: public politeness to other people.
- Civility is closely related both to pluralization (be polite to other religions) and privatization (keep weird and divisive practices in private).

Effects of Civility on Evangelicals

- Downplay offensive doctrines.
- Downplay dogmatic certainty.
- Lose dynamism springing from certainty.
- See James D. Hunter, *Evangelicals: The Coming Generation* 183-184, 212.

You believe in hell??!

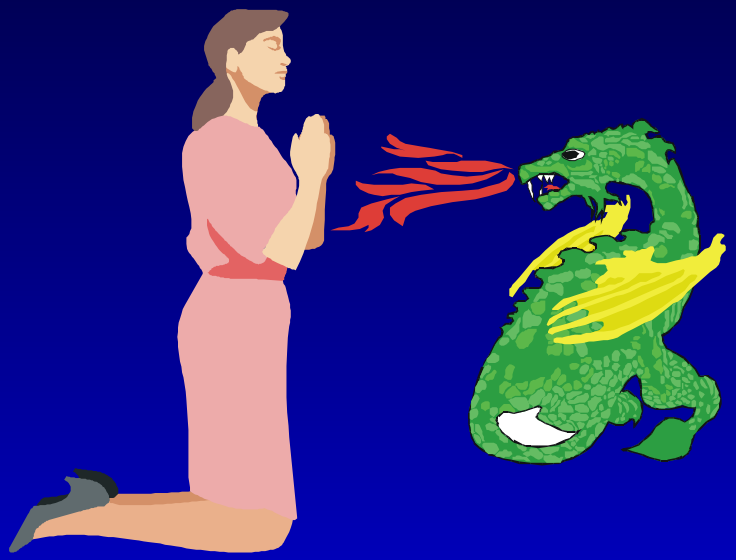
Uh … well, you see, some people get the wrong idea. Christianity is about loving everybody.

Effects of Civility on Evangelicals

- Downplay offensive doctrines.
- Move away from claims to dogmatic certainty.
- Lose dynamism springing from moral and intellectual certainty.
- See James D. Hunter, *Evangelicals: The Coming Generation* 183-184, 212.

2. Response to Secularization: Critique of Modern Idolatries

Kinds of Idols



- History
- Nature
- Humanity
- Mammon
- Power
- Ecclesiastical Institutions
- Sex
- Self

Idolatry in Revelation

- Book of Revelation critiques idolatry.
  - idols of power and state (the Beast)
  - idols of pleasure and Mammon (the Prostitute).

Idolatry in Revelation

- See the Book of Revelation for analysis of idolatry through all time.
  - Especially there is attention to idols of power and state (the Beast) and idols of pleasure and Mammon (the Prostitute).

Non-Western Cultures

- Analyze idolatry in culture.

- Show God's presence in culture (Rom 1:18-21).

Non-Western Cultures

- Communicating critically in non-Western cultures involves appreciation of the particular forms of idolatry and responses to God's unavoidable presence (Rom 1:18-21) in each particular culture.

B. Biblical Interpretation in Communion with the Saints

1. Dialogue with Others

Insights from Your Congregation

- Diversity in the body (1 Cor. 12).
- You are expert in Scripture.
- Others are expert elsewhere.
- Consult others for applications:
  - science, business, art, politics, education, medicine.
  - "What are the issues and struggles?"

Insights from Your Congregation

- Remember the diversity of gifts in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12).
- You are an expert in Scripture.
- Given the specialization in modern life, others will be experts in other areas.
- Consult others in attempting detailed applications to specialized areas: science, business, art, politics, education, medicine.
  - Ask others what are the issues and the struggles.

2. You Speak and Act

Nature of Church Ministry

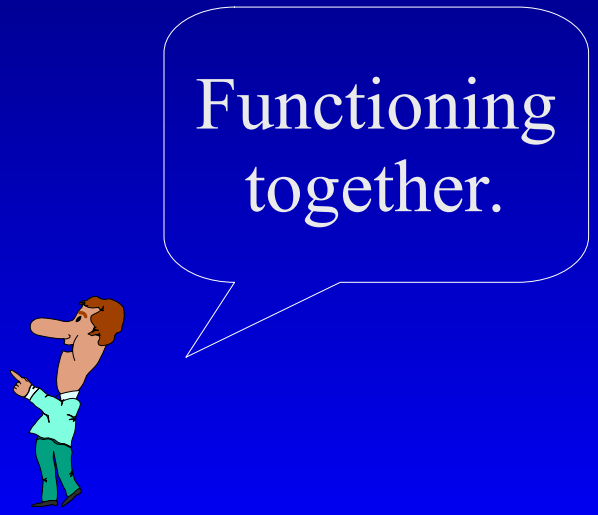
- We naturally notice sermons.
- Other acts supplement communication.

Nature of Church Ministry

- We naturally notice the sermons.
- But other acts join with sermons in the total process of communicating the word of God to people.

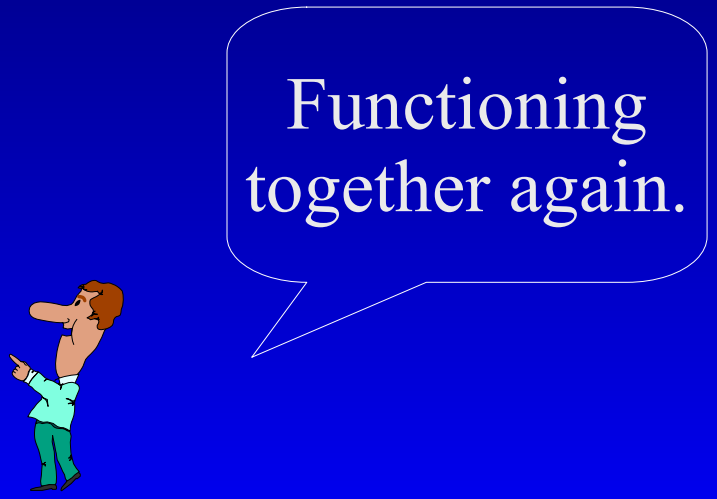
Christ's Ministry

- Teaching (as in parables)
- Working miracles (healing, exorcism)
- Fellowship with apostles and with "sinners"



Ministry of the Apostles

- Words, Acts 20:20.
- Example, Acts 20:19.
- Sharing, Acts 20:35.
- Miracles, Acts 19:11.



Word and Deed in Paul

- Paul's message and example, 1 Thess. 2:1-12.
- Timothy must maintain teaching and example, 1 Tim. 3; 4:6-16.

Paul → Timothy

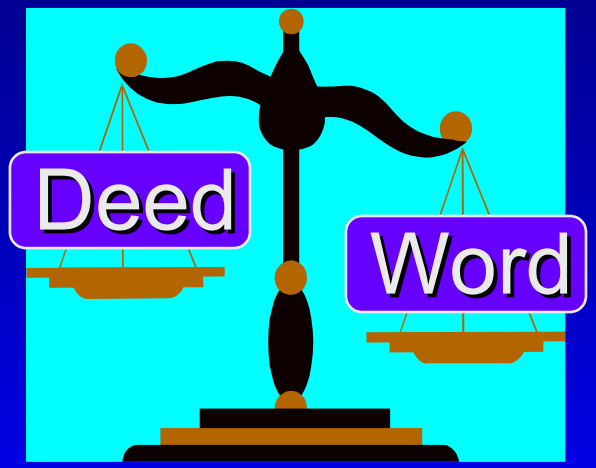
Word and Deed in Paul

- Paul appeals both to his message and to his example, 1 Thess. 2:1-12.
- Paul advises Timothy to maintain both teaching and example, 1 Tim. 3; 4:6-16.

The Bias toward Word Only

Bias through one-sided reasoning:

- "Miracles are unique.
  Jesus does not offer a model."
- We use only the word.



The Bias toward Word Only

It is easy to introduce bias through one-sided reasoning:

- "We may not use Jesus and the apostles as our model in the area of miracles, because miracles were unique to their role in redemptive history."
- Hence, nowadays, we carry on only word ministry.

Maintaining Deed with Word

- Jesus' words are unique by inspiration.
- Jesus is an example by analogy.
- People understand word through experiences.

Word ⟷ Deed

Maintaining Deed with Word

- By parity of reasoning, we cannot not use Jesus and the apostles as a model for our words, because their words were unique in inspiration.
- In fact, they are an example in both areas by analogy, not by identity with our roles.
- God gives people ability to grasp the implications of the Bible partly through life experiences, as he comforts, answers prayer, and reforms their families.

3. Love in Interpretation

Love as Hermeneutical Rule

- "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets," Matt. 22:40.
- Summed up in one commandment, Gal. 5:14.
  - "Love is the fulfilling of the law" Rom. 13:8-10.
- Hermeneutics summed up in one rule: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Love as Hermeneutical Rule

- "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets," Matt. 22:40.
- Or summed up in one commandment, Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8-10: "Love is the fulfilling of the law."
- Hermeneutics can be summed up in one rule: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Violations of Love

You report true facts, but

- in contention.
- getting admiration of yourself.
- producing dependence on yourself.

Violations of Love

If you report true facts, but

- in contention.
- or to build up admiration of yourself.
- or in a way that produces dependence on yourself rather than on the Lord.

4. Hidden Agenda

Your Manner Vs. Your Doctrine

General principle:

- Your life may undermine your teaching.

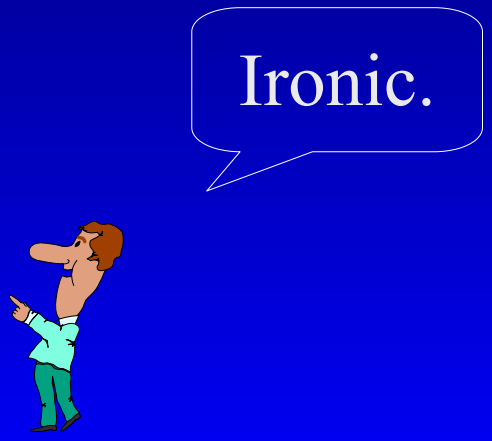
Your Manner Vs. Your Doctrine

General principle:

- Even though you do not realize it, your life or your manner of teaching may subtly give a message that undermines your teaching content.

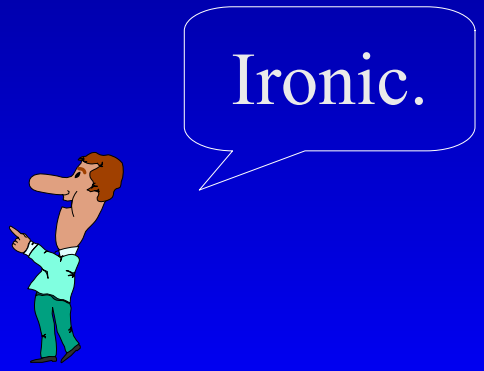
Teaching on Spiritual Gifts

- Teach the diversity of gifts.
- You only are up front.
- People will not <u>really</u> grasp it.



Teaching on Spiritual Gifts

- Teach the diversity of gifts, and that all have gifts.
- But you are the only one ever up front.
- People will not <u>really</u> grasp such teaching because what happens proclaims a contrary message in practice.



Constant Correction of “Errors”

You constantly correct errors.

What bad results?

- Incompetence of laymen.
- Importance of minutiae.
- Fear of general priesthood of believers.
- Formal correctness better than embodied truth.

Constant Correction of "Errors"

What if you constantly correct supposed errors in attempts by laymen to express doctrine?

What bad might you communicate?

- Incompetence of laymen.
- Importance of minutiae.
- Fear of general priesthood of believers.
- Superior value of formal correctness over motivation and embodied truth.

Superiority of Reformed Doctrine

Teach the superiority of Reformed doctrine. What bad results?

- Spiritual pride.
- Security in your understanding of truth.
- Seminary-trained teacher as oracle.
- No fellowship with general evangelicals.

Is Reformed doctrine superior?
Not if you make yourself superior through it.

Superiority of Reformed Doctrine

What if you teach the superiority of Reformed doctrine? What bad effects could result?

- Spiritual pride.
- Security in your understanding of truth.
- Seminary-trained teacher as oracle.
- Inability to extend fellowship to general evangelicals.

Is Reformed doctrine superior?
Not if you make yourself superior by means of it.

Teaching Infant Baptism

Teach infant baptism.
What bad effects result?

- People despise baptists.
- Exacerbate divisions in the body.

Teach the baptistic view as well?

Teaching Infant Baptism

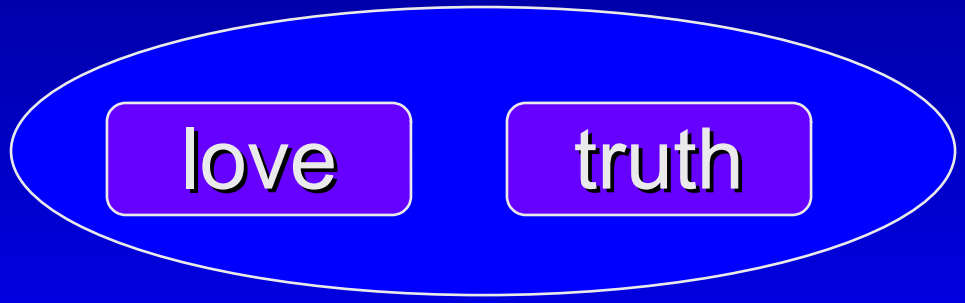
What if you teach the biblical basis for infant baptism? What bad effects might result?

- People despise and suspect those who do not agree.
- Enhance separation with baptists, further exacerbating divisions in the body of Christ.

Why not teach the baptistic view as well?

Conducting Arguments

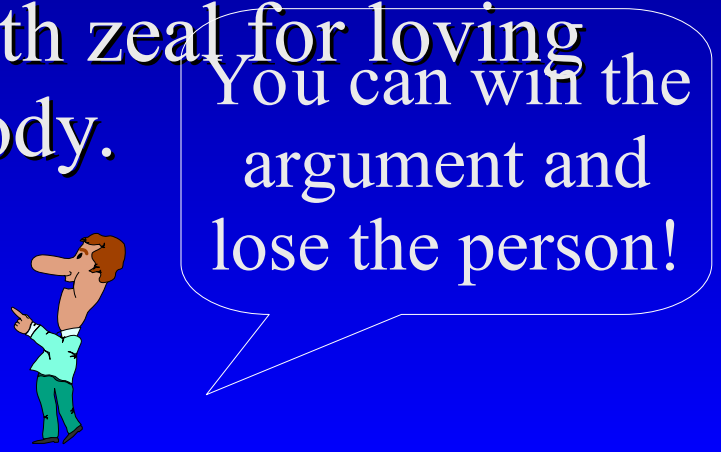
- See Roger Nicole, “How to Deal with Those Who Differ from Us.”
- John Newton, "On Controversy"
- We need zeal for truth.
- Combined with zeal for loving.



You can win the argument and lose the person!

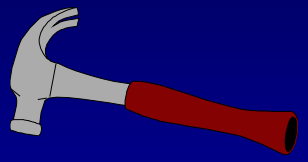
Conducting Arguments

- See Roger Nicole, “How to Deal with Those Who Differ from Us.”
- John Newton, "On Controversy."
- We need zeal for truth in a relativistic and pragmatistic age.
- But it is to be combined with zeal for loving and binding together the body.



Encouraging Lay Ministry

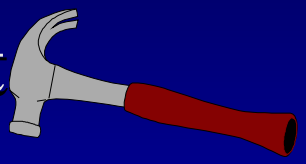
- Risk mistakes from lay ministry?
- Will a carpenter let his son hammer?



- Humility, not errorlessness, gives health.

Encouraging Lay Ministry

- Will we risk seeing mistakes, failures, and aberrations through lay ministry?
- Compare it with a carpenter. Will he let his son use a hammer for the first time?



- Humility, not errorlessness, gives health to the church.

Roland Allen's Challenge

Typical desire for control

- We want zeal.
- But not too much.

Allen's counsel

- Spirit's revivals escape human control.

Maybe my plans are not the same as the Holy Spirit's.

Roland Allen's Challenge

Typical desire for control

- We want zeal.
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- Spirit's more vigorous revivals escape human control.

Maybe my plans are not the same as the Holy Spirit's.

Lay Ministry through Training

- You cannot train everyone.
- Train elders.
  They train others.
- Multiplication more important than skillful preaching.

you → elders

Most pastors are not Superman!

Lay Ministry through Training

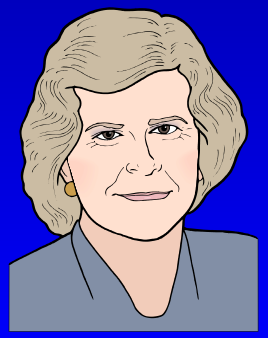
- You cannot train everyone.
- Train elders. If the Spirit works in them, they will become able to train others.
- In the long run, this multiplication of ministry is more important even than skillful preaching.

you → elders

Most pastors are not Superman!

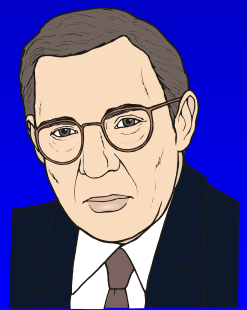
Respecting Holistic Intuitions

- "Hidden agenda" beyond the overt.
- Intuition picks it up.
  - "Women's intuition."
  - Charismatic "prophecy" at best.
    (not claiming inspiration)
- Exercises of "discernment" (Phil. 1:10).



I sense something's wrong.

Nonsense!

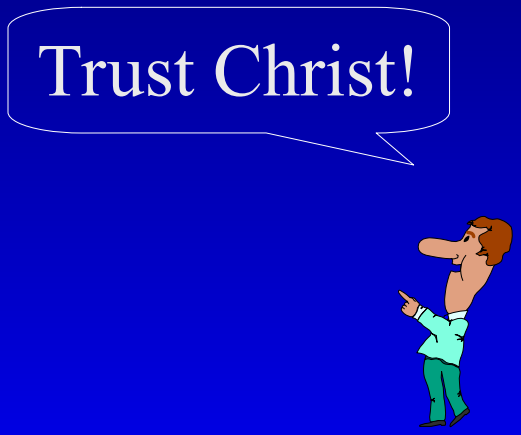


Respecting Holistic Intuitions

- We have seen that there may be “hidden agenda” beyond what someone says overtly.
- Intuition often picks up on this agenda.
  - “Women’s intuition”
  - Charismatic “prophecy” at its best (not to be understood as claiming inspiration).
- These may be exercises of “discernment” in the sense of Phil. 1:10.

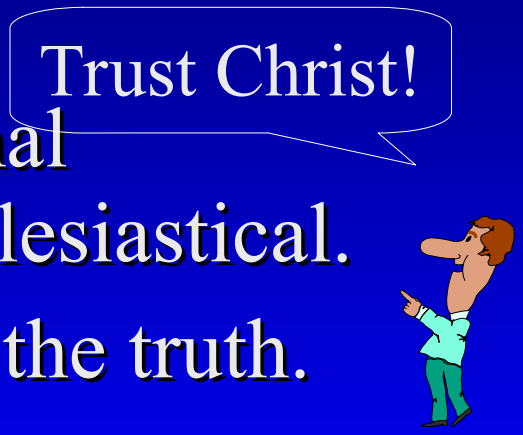
Earthly Static Security

- No security in a static church.
- You “feed the flock.”
  Also more sheep and more flocks.
- No security in institutions,
  doctrinal or ecclesiastical.
- Institutions can aid truth.
- The truth is infinitely deep.



Earthly Static Security

- Beware of seeking security in a static church, in a maintenance operation.
- Your charge is to "feed the flock." But remember that more sheep and more flocks are part of the total picture.
- No ultimate security in institutional systems, whether doctrinal or ecclesiastical.
- At best, these systems are aids to the truth.
- The truth is infinitely deep.



Love among Calvinists

- Love God as Calvin did.
- "Reformed theology is like karate."
- Are Calvinists unloving?

Love among Calvinists

- Love God as Calvin did.
- "Reformed theology is like karate."
- Avoid the reproach that Calvinists are unloving.

C. The Hope for the Consummation

Depth in God's Revelation

- Depth of truth, 1 Cor. 13:12; Eph. 3:17-20; 1:17-19.
- We will know fully later.
- Press on (Phil. 3:12-14).
- Example of Elisabeth Elliot.
  - "I am the LORD."

Depth in God's Revelation

- Depth is indicated by 1 Cor. 13:12; Eph. 3:17-20; 1:17-19.
- We will know fully only in the consummation.
- Press on (Phil. 3:12-14).
- Example of Elisabeth Elliot.
  - "I am the LORD."