

May 31, 2008

**Dear Friends of the Foundation:**

Surely all of us who preach are aware that at times we preach poorly and even faithlessly. There are times when the church should not hear what we say or, hearing it, should reject it.

What may not be so obvious is that sometimes the church rejects the proclamation of the gospel precisely because it is the gospel proclaimed *rightly*:

Man does indeed believe that he knows who and what he is and what the state of his world is. Proclamation now encounters a man who already “understands” himself in one way or another. This is not meant merely noetically, for in this self-understanding man really “possesses” himself. Hence his self-understanding is, as Paul says, the ground and content of his “boast” or “boasting” (Rom. 2:17; 3:27; 4:2; 1 Cor. 1:29; 3:21; 5:6; etc.). He affirms himself in his self-understanding. Therefore, the “Word of the cross” becomes folly to him or a “stumbling block.” **If proclamation is right and becomes effective, a collision results: the proclaimed Word is experienced as attack.**

Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, translated and annotated by Darrell L. Guder, two volumes (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), vol. 1, p. 23 (emphasis added).

Of course, this perception is based upon the prior insight that the church exists by the Word of God alone:

The Church’s existence is based upon the Word of God which is spoken to it, received and proclaimed by it. It *exists* in that it *receives*, and on the basis of its act of reception it *speaks* and *acts*. Its fellowship with Jesus Christ is not a given but a gift which it is always to expect anew. It initially takes on concrete form as a fellowship in the understanding of the Word of God. Its existence is not based upon the fact that it is such a fellowship; rather, the Church exists upon the basis of the Word itself. However, it only *has* the Word in that it *seeks* it and in its seeking and proclaiming *opens* itself to it.

Weber, *Foundations*, vol. 1, p. 22.

So it is the task of theology to question whether the church’s proclamation is done *rightly*:

Wherever in dogmatics individual theologians are at work in the service of the Church, their endeavors can only be significant if they address the query to the Church of whether its proclamation is “right” proclamation, that is, whether it is really the proclamation of the Word of God or perhaps the mere use of the Word for a self-interpretation of Christian man, whether then it is in truth “service” of the Word or lordship over the Word. **In short, the purpose of Christian doctrine is to submit the proclamation of**

**the Church to the criterion of its *commission*, and thus to help it to be relevant to its mandate.**

Weber, Foundations, vol. 1, pp. 24-25 (emphasis added).

The Foundation seeks and promotes the reading, study, understanding, and explication of Reformed theology precisely in the service of its application to the review, criticism, and improvement of all our attempts at preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, that we may ever more faithfully seek to hear and to proclaim the Word of God, in the prayer that the Holy Spirit may use even our words to communicate the grace and mercy of God and so to renew the church.

If you find such work good, useful, and important, I invite you to support the Foundation so that we may continue and expand these efforts.

Grace and Peace,

Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, *Executive Director*

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