

MORE THAN PREACHERS: THE SOLAS AND SOUL-CARE OF THE REFORMERS

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In the 1500's and 1600's, the Solas that emerged from the Reformation were paramount to the proclamation of the true Christ of Scripture and biblical faith, to Europe and even the Americas.² They also were critical to lodging a public and much-needed blow to the abuses and totalitarian control of the Catholic Church leadership. But ultimately, they were orchestrated by God most basically for the glory of God and the salvation of man, and more immediately for shepherding of God's people.

When we think of the protestant reformers, we often think of them as studious scholars and bold preachers heralding the truths of what became known later as the five Solas: "Sola Scriptura," (Scripture Alone) "Sola Gratia," (Salvation by Grace Alone), "Sola Fide," (by faith alone), "Solus Christus," (in Christ Alone), and "Soli Deo Gloria" (for the Glory of God Alone). And, praise to our God, they were! But the reformer's ministry was more than just a public message of setting straight the doctrine of salvation and church leaders. It was vitally connected to the shepherding of their own people. They were more than preachers and so should every pastor today be.

The Reformers' Context

Prior to the reformation, leaders in the Catholic Church were more concerned with power and money than with the care of souls and applying doctrine of the Scriptures where the people lived.³ This was the context of changing and confusing

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² Adapted from a seminar given at The Reformation Conference in Wittenberg, Germany (May 2017) for the European Bible Training Center (EBTC).

³ From *The Story of Christianity* Vol. 2, by Justo L. Gonzales, we learn on pages 7-8: As the fifteenth century came to a close, it was clear that the church was in need of profound reformation, and that many longed for it. The decline and corruption of the papacy was well known ...conciliarism had failed miserably the task of bringing about the needed reform. One of the reasons for such failure was that several of the bishops sitting in the councils were themselves among those who profited from the existing corruption. Thus, while the hopeful conciliarist reformers issued anathemas and decrees against absenteeism, pluralism, simony—the practice of buying and selling ecclesiastical positions—many who sat on the councils were guilty of such practices and were

times, and difficulty on many fronts. Europe was in the throes of religious, political, intellectual, moral, and economic upheaval, while also dealing with the massive death toll of the Bubonic Plague. All these issues precipitated great necessity for the personal and private soul-care of God’s people, towards the glory of God in their living.

This much-needed soul-care was of great concern to the reformers. This is true, because they were much more than the theologians, the speakers, and the writers we often view them as today. They were Pastors—true shepherds to the sheep under their care.

A Passion to Pastor

Dr. Ray Van Neste, Professor at Union University, wrote in his article, *The Care of Souls: The Heart of the Reformation*:

Too often people think of the Reformation in terms of an abstract theological debate. While intensely theological, the Reformation was not merely about ideas; it was about correctly understanding the gospel for the good of the people and the salvation of souls. ... The Reformation was a diverse movement, but at its center was a pulsing, yearning concern for the well-being of souls. Its leaders were pastors at pains to lead their flock...⁴

Though we have this great quote, the fact that Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and Martin Bucer were all first and foremost pastors is rarely written and spoken of formally today. Neither is the fact they were very involved in the care of souls through the private ministry of the Word to the lives of their people. These oversights, unfortunately, have not benefitted our view of the nature and function of the pastor’s role today.

not ready to give them up. Such corrupt leadership set the tone for most of the lesser clergy and the monastics. Gonzales’ book also provides for this written on November 20 1500 by Isabella, Queen of Castile: The dissolution is such, that the souls entrusted to the clergy receive great damage, for we are told that the majority of the clergy are living in open concubinage...they despise our justice and arm themselves against it (Harper Collins Publishers, 10 east 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022).

⁴ Ray Van Neste, “The Care of Souls,” *Themelios* 39.1 (2014):53-63.

The truth is, the reformers clearly followed in the footsteps of Jesus, the apostles, and the early church leaders in regard to soul-care. Jesus is called the wonderful counselor, and refers to himself as the good shepherd of the sheep (John 10:14; 1 Peter 5:4). He is one who sympathizes with our weaknesses, and in Him we can find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). Jesus modeled care for the souls of people as the Father's much-needed public preacher, but also engaged in private ministry to individuals (i.e., Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the rich young ruler, Mary Magdalene, Peter, etc.).⁵ He walked with his disciples in a personal, life-mentoring way and commissioned them to do the same (Matthew 28:18-20). He came to us saying, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18). This is a description of Jesus' very personal, two-fold ministry—both public and private.

The Apostles practiced the same type of ministry as their Lord. Paul preached publicly, and also ministered house-to-house (Acts 20:19). He exhorted the Ephesian Elders to pay careful attention to themselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers (Acts 20:28). He reminded them, "for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears." (Acts 20:31). He rehearsed with the Thessalonians,

We [Paul, Silvanus and Timothy] were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 [explanation from vs.1]

Peter, commissioned as a shepherd of the sheep by Christ himself, warns those pastoring the exiles of the dispersion to be true and humble shepherds of God's people (1 Peter 1: 1; 5:1-3). But this mindset did not end with the apostles. In

⁵ Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), the woman at the well (John 4:1-42), the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22) Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18), Peter (Matthew 16:13-20; John 21:15-23).

the journal article, *An Ancient Pastoral Theology*, Garrick Bailey writes, “From the earliest writings of the Apostolic Fathers to John Chrysostom (aka, “Golden Mouth”), to Augustine of Hippo, ministers will find endless instruction and encouragement for the individual caring of souls—what the Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nazianzus, called the “art of arts and science of sciences.”⁶

The Soul-Care of the Reformers

Clearly the passion of the reformers to truly pastor God’s people grew out of their knowledge of the ministry of Christ and His shepherds that had gone before them. Let us look at some of the reformers we have mentioned and their documented commitment to soul-care.

MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546)

Obviously, Luther’s was a faithful student and bold preacher of the Word. But, Luther was not inclined to sterile study, nor the preaching of the fine points of Theology, apart from the care of souls. Herbert Mayer, professor of Biblical and Historical Theology wrote,

Luther believed impersonal preaching did little good. ... At one point in his life, Luther went so far as to suggest that sincere Christians should meet together in homes ... His theology of the Word led him to be a forerunner of the present-day small group movements within the church.⁷

Luther, then, firmly advocated for both the public and private ministry of the word by pastors. Henrik Ivarsson, in his article, *Principles of Pastoral Care according to Luther*, quotes the reformer on the roles of the pastor:

...he baptizes, preaches the Gospel, administers Communion, comforts and strengthens weak and afflicted consciences, rebukes the evil doers with

⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *In Defense of His Flight to Pontus*, 2.16.

⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, *In Defense of His Flight to Pontus*, 2.16.

excommunication, practices works of love and mercy and bears the cross.⁸

Ivarsson further explains by revealing the terminology that Luther used when speaking of the private care of the soul: “die Seelen weiden,” meaning “to tend souls”. Luther described this tending of the soul as “advising the conscience with Christian conversation and mutual comforting by the pastor.”⁹

The reformer consistently coupled the idea of “seelsorge” (the care of souls) with other essential duties of a pastor. This is further evidenced in his ministry, in that he spoke on various struggles that his members dealt with, wrote a guide for teaching children, counseled hundreds in his letters and instituted table talks (originally for his own family but later ministered to many others); all while receiving personal death threats (for his beliefs).¹⁰ Luther also said of pastors,

Men who hold the office of the ministry should have the heart of a mother toward the church, for if they have no such heart, they soon become lazy and disgusted, and suffering, in particular, will find them unwilling. ... Unless your heart toward the sheep is like that of a mother toward her children – a mother, who walks through fire to save her children—you will not be fit to be a preacher. Labor, work, unthankfulness, hatred, envy, and all kinds of sufferings will meet you in this office. If then, the mother heart, the great love, is not there to drive the preachers, the sheep will be poorly served.¹¹

Luther’s ministry was very similar to that of Huldrych Zwingli.

⁸ Henrik Ivarsson, “The Principles of Pastoral Care According to Martin Luther,” *Pastoral Psychology*, 19.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cf. Theodore Tappert’s *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1960).

At the Gospel Coalition website

(http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/articel/a_lesson_from_peter_the-barber/). One can find that he wrote lengthy letters to help people through various circumstances. He wrote one letter to his barber – “Peter” – who had mentioned to Luther that he was struggling in his prayers.

¹¹ Edwald Plass (ed). *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, 932.

HULDRYCH (ULRICH) ZWINGLI (1484-1531)

God in His good providence, raised up other godly pastors who were part of the reformation and while caring for souls. Huldrych (Ulrich) Zwingli was one of them. Zwingli was born in Zurich, Switzerland and was a parish priest at Great Minster Church in Zurich, beginning in 1519. He was also a patriot who served as a chaplain for Zurich troops. Eventually, Zwingli died in battle.

We see in his life not only a high commitment to the Scriptures, but also to the members of the body of Christ. In a letter, he wrote in 1516 he said, "led by the Word and Spirit of God, I saw the need to set aside all these [human teachings] and to learn the doctrine of God direct from his own Word."¹² But also, as a pastor, he preached in the language of the people. He wanted his people to know what the Scriptures taught. Zwingli eventually only practiced ecclesiastically what was evidenced in the Scriptures. Under his ministry, the Mass was completely gone in his church by 1525. All his parishioners partook of communion; not only the Priest. Images and the veneration of Mary also were totally eliminated from his church. All of these changes signified Zwingli's commitment to the Scriptures, and its application to life and ministry for God's glory and the good of His people.

Zwingli evidenced his Scriptural care for his flock in that he loved them to point of personal risk. He was bold, speaking directly against the use of mercenaries, the abuses of the church and the sale of indulgences. He went so far as to expose himself to the Bubonic Plague. Putting himself in danger, he remained with the sick in order to minister to them. Over 2,000 died in Zurich (which only had a population of 7,000), so there were many he pastored who were affected by it. Zwingli himself contracted the plague and almost died. Following the example of Christ, he was willing to give up his life for the well-being of the sheep.¹³

In summation, Zwingli embodied a pastor who was committed to the Scriptures, committed to the church, and committed to the care of souls. He, like

¹² Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 117.

¹³ Christian Catherwood, *Five Leading Reformers*, 74. Timothy George also discusses this in his book, *Theology of the Reformers*, 118-123.

Luther, believed in the authority of Scripture for faith and practice, which in turn fueled his personal care of the flock.

HEINRICH BULLINGER (1504-1575)

Heinrich Bullinger was a pastor and reformer who followed Zwingli in Zurich.¹⁴ Bullinger was a prolific writer, and preached over 7,750 messages while in Zurich. But he also was a pastor, fully committed to the care of souls.

Bullinger was known for being hospitable; opening his house to widows, orphans, and other persecuted brothers and sisters. He contributed much of what he had to help those in need; whether it be food, money or possessions. Bullinger's care and ministry to specific needs was further evidenced in that his first book was written on the subject of comforting the sick and dying—no doubt a result of the plague and his own experience with it.¹⁵ Unfortunately, Bullinger also became very ill during the plague, and his wife and several daughters died with it. Bullinger was another reformer and a pastor who embodied the seelsorge Luther spoke of.

MARTIN BUCER (1491-1551)

The Reformer, Martin Bucer, also regularly engaged in the care of souls. He heralded the truths of the reformation in Strasbourg, Germany. He had a strong pastoral influence on the more well-known reformer John Calvin; having spent 3 years with him in Strasbourg. In 1538, Martin Bucer wrote the book, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, on how hurting and wounded Christians are to be helped.¹⁶ He used four texts, Matthew 18:15-17, 2 Corinthians 2:6-8; 12:20-21 and Galatians 6:1-2. In writing about what we can draw from these passages he stated, "The first is that the wounded sheep are to be given treatment by all Christians, but particularly by the carers [pastors] of souls"¹⁷

¹⁴ www.ligonier.org/blog/reformation-and-men-behind-it (blogs by Steve Lawson).

¹⁵ *The Decades of Henry Bullinger* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1852).

¹⁶ Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, xxxii. He writes, "those who are ordained to the pastoral office in the church are to be the principal physicians of souls and guardians..." p.121

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

In his works, Bucer stressed the need for pastors to return to the early church's care for its people.¹⁸ One example is the title, "How the Healthy and Strong Sheep are to be Guarded and Fed."¹⁹ Furthermore, Bucer wrote, "The doctrine of Christ must be proclaimed not only in the pulpit, but also in the home and to each one individually."²⁰ He expounds on this in detail with this paragraph:

This is why Christian doctrine and admonition must not be confined to the assembly and the pulpit; because there are very many people who will take what they are taught and admonished in the public gathering as being of only general application, and consider it to apply more to others than to themselves. Therefore, it is essential that people should also be instructed, taught and led on in Christ individually in their homes. And those who wish to hinder all ministers of Christ everywhere from dispensing and proclaiming Christ's doctrine not only in public and general sermons but also from house to house, to each one individually, are opposing the Holy Spirit and fighting against the reformation of the church.²¹

JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564)

John Calvin, in Geneva, was quite in step with the other reforming pastors. His ministry to God's people was passionate, public, and private. He seemed to prefer the term "shepherd" for the office of pastor. It has been said of him, "Though he may be first thought of as a theologian, he was even more a pastor of souls."²² Timothy George, a dean and professor of church history and doctrine at Beeson Divinity School has written, "Calvin preached justification by faith, as all the reformers did. More than some, perhaps, he preached sanctification by faith. The lives of those who believed the Word of God would be transformed by that Word. Holiness was the fruit of faith. To believe the Word was to live by the Word..."²³ This conviction would necessitate Calvin's involvement in the lives of his parishioners. Though Calvin is well known for his firm beliefs on the doctrine of Scripture, few people are aware of his extensive private ministry of the Word.

¹⁸ Ibid., xix.

¹⁹ Ibid., 173-82.

²⁰ Ibid., 181.

²¹ Ibid., 181-2.

²² J.D. Benoit, John Calvin, *Contemporary Prophet*, 51.

²³ Timothy George, *Reading the Scripture with the Reformers*, 244.

Calvin practiced particular (private) instruction as well as the public proclamation we know him for. He was in the habit of praying for, offering spiritual counsel, and also consolation and correction to the flock through home visitation.²⁴ He made regular visits to prepare certain members for the taking of communion. He wrote letters of comfort when there was a death in the family. He, like Zwingli, did not fail to visit those infected with the Plague. In addition to these forms of private ministry, he would address sensitive issues that arose in the church, like when some of the refugee families were causing trouble in the congregation or when he wrote an extensive letter to a father who was overcome with grief over the death of the man's son.²⁵

Calvin was intentional and careful in his private ministry of the Word. One of Calvin's friends said of him,

No words of mine can declare the fidelity and prudence with which he gave counsel, the kindness with which he received all who came to him, the clearness and promptitude with which he replied to those who asked his opinion on the most important questions, and the ability with which he disentangled the difficulties and problems which were laid before him. Nor can I express the gentleness with which he could comfort the afflicted, and raise the fallen and distressed."²⁶

Calvin also preached in his Sermon #37 on 1 Timothy,

We who have charge to teach the people must not only see what is profitable for them all in general, but we must also deal with everyone according to his age ...And therefore, if we want to do our duty toward God, and to those who are committed to our charge, it is not

²⁴ Cited in an essay by J.D. Benoit, "Pastoral Care of the Prophet." Concerning Calvin, he writes, "there was within him a humanity, a strength of sympathy, a warmth of soul, a paroral concern which opened hearts to him." P.67

²⁵ Timothy George, *Reading the Scripture with the Reformers*, 245. Cited in the essay by Robert Godfrey, "The Counselor to the Afflicted," in *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine and Doxology*, 88. Calvin writes, "When I first received intelligence of the death...of your son Louis, I was so utterly overpowered that for many days I was fit for nothing but to grieve; and albeit I was somehow upheld before the Lord by those aids wherewith he sustains our souls in affliction among men, however, I was almost a nonentity."

²⁶ Ray Van Neste, "The Care of Souls," *Themelios*, 180-81.

enough for us to offer them the doctrine generally, but when we see any of them go astray, we must labor to bring him to the right way. When we see another in grief and sorrow, we must go about to comfort him. When we see anyone who is dull of the spirit, we must prick him and spur him, as his nature will bear.²⁷

Calvin's life and words call us to sincere soul-care in and out of the pulpit. As we have seen, he is far from alone in that call.

THEODORE BEZA (1519-1605)

Theodore Beza followed John Calvin in Geneva. Beza said regarding pastoral ministry:

It is not only necessary that (a Pastor) have general knowledge of his flock, but he must also know and call each of his sheep by name, both in public and in their homes, both night and day. Pastors must run after lost sheep, bandaging up the one with a broken leg, strengthening the one that is sick.... In sum, the pastor must consider his sheep more dear to him than his own life, following the example of the Good Shepherd.²⁸

Throughout the Reformation, there developed in Geneva, an ongoing practice of the care of souls. The ordinances of the Church prescribed that each minister accompanied by an elder should regularly call in the homes of his parish. In 1550, an order was issued that the ministers should visit each home, routinely, at least once a year. Beza commented on the effect of the order by saying, "It is hard to believe how fruitful it proved to be."²⁹ There were also regular visitations in the hospitals and prisons, and to the sick or dying at home.³⁰

Clearly, the pastors of the Reformation provided soul-care for their flocks. This means that when individuals were experiencing trouble or sin in their lives,

²⁷ John Calvin, Sermon series on 1 Timothy (Ray Van Neste and Brian Denker edited and updated the 1579 English edition of Calvin's Sermons on 1 Timothy. Michael Duduit and Brian Denker made these messages available on Amazon, New Edition of Calvin's Sermons on 1 Timothy, on Kindle).

²⁸ Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin*, 35.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

³⁰ Wilhelm Pauck, *The Ministry in the Time of the Continental Reformation*, 136.

they were counseled by their shepherd. Parishioners were experiencing the ministry of the Word to their lives in a way that the Roman Catholic Church had failed. But unfortunately, for many, seelsorge (the care of souls) waned post the reformation.

Soul-Care After the Reformation

In spite of the strong convictions of the pastoring reformers, soul-care did not receive the same notoriety as the sola doctrines and leadership reform after the Reformation. By the time of Luther's death even the German Reformation proper had lost a significant portion of its earlier vitality. By the end of the sixteenth century, Lutheran churches had become more traditional and experienced a resurgence of clerical authority, a more stoic approach to doctrine, and a muddying of Luther's clear gospel. While Luther's dynamic understanding of forgiveness has continued to be a reforming power for the Christian church in the following centuries, the reformer's clear focus on the importance of the pastor's private ministry did not continue to proliferate in the same way.³¹

No doubt, as a result of waning soul-care, Pietism sprang up in Germany. When formalism and sterile doctrine arises, and soul-care wanes, it will spawn an increase in mysticism (separating "the Spirit's" (pseudo) communication from His Word), as well as valuing experience over doctrine. Thus the Pietistic movement under the Lutheran theologian Philipp Spener in the late sixteen and early seventeen hundreds actually worked against an already declining private ministry of the Word. The Reformation historian, Dr. John Armstrong, outlines this problem following the Reformation:

It [Pietism] arose in a context where official religious faith dominated the day and very few took personal interest in developing the kind of faith and practical holiness that led to obedience to the law of Christ. Simply put, the strongly scholastic Lutheran dogma of the time, which separated justification too radically from sanctification, had produced a "dead orthodoxy."³² [examination mine]

³¹ Herbert Mayer, *Pastoral Care*, 111.

³² John Armstrong, *Reformation and Revival Journal*, Vol 10, #1, Winter 2001, p15.

On the other hand, the effects of the Reformation, including a strengthening private pastoral ministry continued throughout the 1600's in England. George Herbert's (Anglican priest, 1593-1633) work, *Country Parson*, had an ongoing effect throughout the 17th century. He wrote, "In a disordered world, the pastor's place was every place within the parish."³³ Church historians, Clebsch and Jaskle write, "Pastoral care during this era therefore focuses on sustaining human souls through the perplexities, difficulties, and pitfalls of their earthly pilgrimage and, in a subordinate way, on guiding believers into paths of personal morality."³⁴ The puritans of that time and place also had strong convictions on soul-care. A Puritan, Richard Baxter (1615-1691), mentions in his work, *The Reformed Pastor*, that he visited members of his church two days each week.³⁵ He also wrote, "...some who come constantly to private meetings are grossly ignorant; whereas, in one hour's familiar instruction of them in private, they seem to understand more, and better entertain it than they did in all their lives before."³⁶ Baxter also wrote, "I have found by experience, that some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse in half an hours' close discourse, than they did from ten years' public preaching."³⁷

The great preacher, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), after his conversion at Yale University, was a pastor whose preaching and writing led to the great American awakening in the seventeen hundreds (1703-1758). Edwards Father, Timothy, was also a pastor and great preacher, who is said to have followed the reformers in the care of souls, in that he did quite a bit of counseling with his parishioners. However, his son Jonathan, admittedly did not.³⁸

³³ Ray Van Neste, "The Care of Souls," *Themelios*. 22.

³⁴ William Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*, 28.

³⁵ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*. P. 43. Also, Paul Lim writes in *Christianity Today*, "As a pastor, Baxter believed that conversion could happen at any age, and that the most effective way of finding out whether a person needed to be converted was not by public preaching but by private conversation. He would spend an hour with each family, using the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments to instruct each person and gauge his or her spiritual condition. Every Monday and Thursday Baxter would start at one end of town, his assistant would start at the other, and together they managed to interview 15 or 16 families a week—a total of 800 families (the whole parish) each year." (an article entitled, "A Pen in God's Hand," *Christianity Today*, July/August 2017.). It is helpful to know that Baxter entitled his book, *The Reformed Pastor* not due to reformed doctrine per se, but due to a revival (a personal reformation) needed for the Pastor and his duties.

³⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*. P. 43. Also, Paul Lim writes in *Christianity Today*, 212.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

³⁸ Michael J. McClymond, Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Johnathan Edwards*, 464.

So, even though Jonathan Edwards was used greatly by God in ways, stood firm on the doctrines of grace, and has given so much to the church, the reformers would surmise that he was not a shepherd, per se, in the full sense of the word. From Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott's book, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, we learn of Samuel Hopkin's testimony on the subject. Hopkins was Edward's protégé and first biographer.

He wrote that Edwards did not take up the usual ministerial practice of visiting his people from house to house. Hopkins explained that,

"he supposed that ministers should, with respect to this, consult their own talents and circumstances, and visit more or less according to the degree in which they could hope thereby to promote the great ends of the ministry. He knew that some ministers were talented in visiting, and he was not. Besides, he was in a large parish so, 'it would have taken up a great part of my time,' which he thought could be put to better use in his study...Some have said that they reflect on the puritan ideal as the pastor in prayer and study procuring food (i.e., spiritual sustenance") for his flock...Others have suggested that this abandonment of pastoral custom typified an un-pastoral aloofness that contributed to the failure of his Northampton pastorate."³⁹

Though it is painful to realize, Edwards did not follow Christ and the Apostle's two-fold model of a shepherd (public and private ministry of the Word). The reformation pastors spoke with such passion on this subject, they no doubt would have insisted that the personal ministry of the Word was a skill that Jonathan Edwards would need to learn, and suffer if need be, if he was to truly shepherd his flock. And they might add that there are few pastors who can say they feel themselves "talented" for all parts of the ministry, in that it all comes naturally. It is selflessness and a sincere, Christlike love for God's people that produces the pastor's motivation to shepherd in hard ways. This is what imitating Jesus' shepherding is about.

³⁹ Michael J. McClymond, Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Johnathan Edwards*, 465.

Unfortunately, Edward's widespread ministry and notoriety, coupled with his singular pastoral focus, may have had a part in proliferating in the Americas the acceptance of the same kind of pastoral imbalance as that of the Early Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, is this not the same imbalance that would later be a catalyst for the largely unattested removal or neglect of soul care with so many churches in the 1800's (Europe) and 1900's (America)? This happened through the psychology movement. Could it be that what Freud set out to do in creating a 'secular clergy' was actually possible (on a large scale), at least in part as a result of the "preaching-only" pastor mentality?⁴⁰

Where We Are Today

Despite the past 40-year pushback against secular and secularly trained "soul-care" by proponents of the biblical counseling movement, there is still an acceptable trend of pastors who do not engage in the private ministry of the Word (counseling) with troubled souls. Churches tend to not demand more from seminary graduates than their MDiv degree. These graduates often have no intern experience, character assessment or ministry experience with people. Seminaries have rightly stressed the all-important doctrines, the critical preaching of the Word, evangelism, and missions. But only a few do enough to prepare the pastor for personal involvement and real soul-care using the Scriptures.⁴¹ This is evidenced by the reality that only a token course or two are required in their curriculum on caring individually for the sheep, counseling, and the more pastoral duties of involved oversight. In the majority of seminaries, a psychologist or psychiatrist is brought in to teach the counseling course.

They do not equip the pastor on how to privately minister the Word (God's gospel, person, and truths for healing, renewal and change) for the glory of God. They are instructed to simply refer their sheep outside the church to those who have been trained under secular constructs and have engaged in very little or no formal

⁴⁰ Freud wrote, "I want to entrust [analysis] to a profession that doesn't yet exist, a profession of secular ministers of souls, who don't have to be physicians and must not be priests." From Freud's article, "The Question of 'Lay' Analysis." (1926), and quoted in Bettelheim, *Freud and Man's Soul*, p.35.

⁴¹ These seminaries tend to be church-based ones. Dr. John Frame writes about this in his book, *The Academic Captivity of Theology*.

theological studies. Unfortunately, seminary curriculums are not always guided by the priorities of the Scriptures, nor the needs of the Church. Dr. John Frame, well-known theologian and professor at Reformed Theological Seminary, has this to say about this problem:

The agenda of evangelical seminaries are set primarily by scholars. Professors decide how students will spend their time; they determine the students' priorities; they set the pace. And guess what. Scholars' agenda seldom match the needs of the church.⁴²

Also giving evidence to the work that still must be done to change a singular pastoral perspective is the apparent disinterest in soul care on the part of church leadership. When preaching conferences are held, the attendance by pastors around the world can be staggering. When biblical counseling conferences are held to help equip shepherds and others within the church to counsel their flocks from the Scriptures, the attendance is drastically lower. The following do not serve to lessen the problem either:

- Most non-organic problems are now called disorders and the church has bought into the enemy's lie that God, His Word and the local church cannot help such issues.
- Many pastors still believe there is a call to preach (as a pastor) but not to counsel (carry out intensive discipleship), wrongly assessing that there is a gift of counseling that they do not have.
- Other pastors or aspiring pastors seem to simply translate (in their mind) the word 'pastor' to mean 'preacher.' At least this is how they functionally operate. It is almost as if they see only one imperative in the Scriptures for Pastors (to "preach the Word"), lacking attention to other clear imperatives for the Shepherd.
- Churches sometimes actually discourage their pastors from the private ministry of the Word and individual involvement, preferring

⁴² Dr. Richard Pratt writes this in the forward for John Frame's book, *The Academic Captivity of Theology*. xi-xii.

them to just study, preach, speak elsewhere and write rather than do counseling.⁴³

- Some pastors avoid getting involved with people and their problems because it is hard and messy work that could lead to legal problems (not knowing how to handle them or the safeguards). Indeed, counseling some individuals at times can be like trying to fold a fitted-sheet, without the desired “guiding four-corners.” These situations require extra preparation.
- Some believe Ephesians 4:11-12 refers to two types of church leaders; the pastor and the teacher, rather than one pastor-teacher. The Granville-Sharp rule of hermeneutics eliminates this distinction, combining the two functions as one in the same.
- Many pastors still believe that when they refer their members to a Christian counselor, the counselor is engaging the church member in biblical truth with specific application of the Word. In the overwhelming majority of cases, this is not so. In addition, they are likely being exposed and challenged with unbiblical interpretations, concepts and/or solutions.⁴⁴

In Conclusion

Exploring the words and lives of the Reformers, it is clear we must guard against viewing the Protestant Reformation as merely a theological debate or an academic study. No doubt, to maintain biblical balance, seminaries must, first of all, continue to call and train pastors to handle and preach the Word faithfully (2

⁴³ Even the well-known Charles Haddon Spurgeon, often referred to as ‘the last of the Puritans,’ set within his busy weekly schedule to counsel his people on Tuesday afternoons and visit with his people on Saturday afternoons. C.H. Spurgeon, *The Full Harvest, Autobiography: Vol 2*, p. 323. You can view his schedule at <http://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/blog-entries/how-spurgeon-scheduled-his-week>

⁴⁴ This is a common testimony we hear from those we counsel in The Association of Certified Counselors (ACBC). Counselees explain how the Christian counselor they previously counseled with did not pray, use Scripture, or talk about the Gospel or the importance of the Word of God and the local church. The pastor needs to realize that if the counselor is licensed by the State, they are not to engage in spiritual dialogue with the counselee due to accountability with the State. A helpful book showing the practical differences in how a hurting individual is helped from four different Christian approaches and one biblical counseling approach: *Christianity and Counseling: Five Approaches*, IVP. Another book revealing biblical ways to help deeply troubled individuals is, *Counseling the Hard Cases*.

Timothy 2:15; 4:1-2). But, as we have seen, the Reformation flowed from a soul-care dearth produced by Roman Catholicism. And it reestablished Christlike care and protection to the body of Christ. It was accompanied by a passion to bring the Solas down to where the people lived and to care for souls. It was carried out by men who understood their roles as shepherd, and who did not forsake any of it, even in such times as the Reformation and the Bubonic Plague.

Now, we must ask ourselves if in the much-needed fight for the Gospel, the authority of Scripture, and faithful interpretation, have seminaries and pastors lost something else that is extremely important to God?—the care of His people through the private ministry of His Word. Have we, for the sake of the fight reduced the role of shepherd to preacher? If so, are we not in essence out on the proverbial limb sawing ourselves off from the heart of God’s plan for shepherds? Are some who cry, “Sola Scriptura” still in danger of creating their own standard of shepherding?

Both public and private ministry are mandated for the shepherd, and both mandates will bring upon them an awesome accounting by God, who says about Shepherds in Hebrews 13:17, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account...” (italics mine). In 1 Peter 5:1-4, we read,

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the suffering of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed; shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Regardless of how one views the adequacy of the biblical counseling movement initially, it can surely be said that what Martin Luther was to the Reformation (In the 1500’s), Jay Adams was to the church (in the latter 1900’s); calling it back to Christlike, biblical soul-care.” Kudos for men like him and those who, all along, have faithfully modeled Christ in their shepherding, with both public and private ministry to souls. As a result of God’s work through many

faithful men, there does seem to be a shifting of the tide. And there is hope for the misguided preacher to become a complete pastor. Following Christ's encouragement in Revelation 2 will revolutionize the ministry of the preaching only pastor. In verse two, Jesus says to the Church of Ephesus, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first." But for some there must be a new beginning rather than a return. Such was the case with Richard Baxter when he wrote,

I do now, in behalf of Christ, and for the sake of his Church, and the immortal souls of men, beseech all the faithful ministers of Christ, that they will presently and effectually fall upon this work. Combine for the unanimous performance of it, that it may more easily procure the submission of your people. I must confess, I find, by some experience, that this is the work that, through the grace of God, which worketh by means, must reform indeed; that must expel our common prevailing ignorance; that must bow the stubborn hearts of sinners; that must answer their vain objections, and take off their prejudices; that must reconcile their hearts to faithful ministers, and help on the success of our public preaching; and make true godliness a commoner thing than it has hitherto been. I find that we never took the best course for demolishing the kingdom of darkness, till now. I wonder at myself, how I was so long kept off from so clear and excellent a duty. But the case was with me, as I suppose it is with others. I was long convinced of it, but my apprehension of the duty too small, and so I was long hindered from the performance of it. I imagined the people would scorn it, and none but a few, who had least need, would submit to it, and I thought my strength would never go through with it, having so great burdens on me before; and thus I long delayed it, which I beseech the Lord of mercy to forgive. Whereas upon trial, I find the difficulties almost nothing (save only through my extraordinary bodily weakness) to that which I imagined; and I find the benefits and comforts of the work to be such, that I would not wish I had forborne it, for all the riches in the world...And I find more outward signs of success with most that do come, than from all my public preaching to them. If you say, It is not so in most places, I answer, I wish that the blame of this may not lie much with ourselves. If however, some

refuse your help, that will not excuse you for not affording it to them that would accept of it.⁴⁵

Perhaps a first step in applying Christ's three-fold remedy in Revelation Chapter Two is to address one's view of the sufficiency of the Scriptures for soul-care (the work of the Holy Spirit through the Truth concerning God, man, salvation, life, and change, within the context of the body of Christ). A second step might be to deal with where one is at in regard to loving God's people like Christ. A pastor cannot really be loving Jesus (the Head of the Church) as he should without sacrificially loving and caring for the Church (the Body of Jesus) the way He did. A third step may be to gain the training you lack to sufficiently minister the Scriptures with wisdom to specific needs. Remember, there is no "call to preach," but there is a call to the office of Pastor/teacher. And such are commanded to make disciples, teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded, and to equip others for the work of the ministry (Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11-13). And the only way to grow one's skill in the personal aspects of discipleship is to exercise it in ministry, John Frame warns,

If you try to minister to people without a solid knowledge of God's Word and an ability to apply it to human needs, you are worse than a physician who treats people in medical ignorance; even worse for the consequences can be eternal.⁴⁶

We are in great debt to the Reformation pastors for their example of holding to the teaching of the Scriptures. They encourage us to follow Christ in the major aspects of pastoring. One thing is sure. They were more than preachers. After reviewing of the great Reformation giants, whether one needs encouragement or a change of heart going forward, this final quote by Dr. Ray Van Neste can help any minister solidify a righteous and dependent determination regarding soul care.

Young Theologs, if your main activity is discussing theology but it does not result in a deep love and concern for people, you are no heir of the Reformation, regardless of your theological positions. Pastors

⁴⁵ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 42-43. In the booklet, *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (edited version by Timothy K. Beougher), Beougher points out that Baxter was a near invalid, dealing with sickness most of his life. From the age of 21 on he was "seldom an hour free from pain." p.9.

⁴⁶ John Frame, *The Academic Captivity of Theology*, p.93.

and those who desire to be pastors, if your idea of pastoral ministry is limited to the pulpit, then you are no heir of the Reformation regardless of the length or theological weight of your sermons. The Reformers, mirroring Christ and the apostles, were deeply involved in the lives of their people, aware that they would be called to account for the oversight of their souls (Hebrews 13:17). A passion for souls requires the knowledge of specific souls and involvement in the messiness of their everyday lives."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Ray Van Neste, "The Care of Souls," *Themelios*, p.63.