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SUPPORTING THE ENLARGEMENT OF A PRESBYTERIAN WITNESS LOYAL TO SCRIPTURE AND THE REFORMED FAITH

Pattern and Rule

Law, of course, means righteousness and this is at the heart of the salvation process. In the salvation of men, righteousness is given by imputation—He who perfectly kept the law imputes His righteousness to believers for their salvation. But once saved, the law takes on a different dimension, according to *Theonomy*. It now becomes both the pattern and the rule of life, with obedience a *must*—by the power of the Holy Spirit, of course.

Moreover, the law is also the pattern and the rule of life for *all* men and for nations, even those that do not acknowledge it. This conclusion is grounded on the premise that the law describes the character of the God who created all men. It's a bit like saying there is one mathematical system governing the universe and even those who know nothing of mathematics are nevertheless governed by universal mathematical laws operating in every sphere of life.

—The Editor
See p. 9

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON FOR OCTOBER 1
CIRCLE BIBLE STUDY FOR OCTOBER

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Mailbag

THERE'S HELP

I read with joy the editorial in the Aug. 16 *Journal*, "No Help." Why joy, when the author doesn't appear to know the way of salvation? Because the editorial is evidence that the writer is *looking* and the Lord says that is a sign that we shall find: "And ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

The author wrote that from his experience, "Christianity seems to be for special people. It belongs to people who love."

The truth is that Christianity belongs to those who *are* loved . . . by God: "We love Him because He first

loved us" (I John 4:19). One cannot love nor can he be lovable until he first is loved by Jesus Christ and owns Him as his Lord and Saviour.

Any who wish to know God must go to Him with a repentant heart, tell Him they know they are sinners and need the forgiveness of their sins which God provided by having His Son to die on the cross for them.

Our ability to love others comes only as an end result of God's love for us and not the other way around.

—Mrs. Patricia Prechtel
Lutherville, Md.

The writer of "No Help" (*Journal*, Aug. 16) used three phrases which indicated a troubled conscience: "impatient words," "unkind inclinations," and "blowing my horn impatiently." These admitted weaknesses painted a verbal self-portrait of an

angry person.

In Matthew 5:22 we are told that anger is a sin, that if the sinner is unrepentant he will be subject to the penalty of God's judgment. But in a church where the Gospel is preached, the writer of that editorial would have learned that God forgives sin for Christ's sake.

Sin! You do not hear much about that, or judgment, either, in those modern churches that major Sunday after Sunday on love, love, love. Too many shepherds apparently are afraid to risk the charge of negativism—offending the flock by giving equal time, as the Bible surely does, to those two disturbing words, sin and judgment.

The church that mostly propounds "You have to love" is not a Bible teaching church in the true sense. When the preacher bypasses the fact of sin, the power of sin and the forgiveness of sin, he fails to show his listeners *how* they can come to love toward God and love toward men.

Yes, the Gospel does have help to offer on how to love God and one's fellowmen. But one must go to the Source, not to buildings structured by fallible men.

—A. Wayne Wilhelm
Black Mountain, N.C.

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GO THOU AND DO . . .

As a new Christian I enjoy your magazine. Our church gives each new member a subscription for six months. Your magazine has strengthened my faith and I want to thank you. You will never know how many lives you touch and move forward in Christian maturity.

—A New Christian
(And I love it!)

We do not ordinarily print unsigned letters. But this one was understandably hard to pass up.—Ed.

SHE KNOWS

The Layman's column for August 23, "The Question of Custody" hit home to my own situation. I wish there were a simple answer to this growing dilemma in today's society.

Every other weekend I watch my daughter leave me and go with her father whose decision it was to leave us over a year ago.

Twice a month I feel part of my life

had come "not to destroy but to fulfill" the law to mean, "not to destroy but to confirm" the law. The Lord did not mean merely to say that He had come Himself to obey the law, but rather to confirm or establish its eternal validity—to declare that it would never be abrogated. The author devotes more than 40 pages of his book to this single point.

Law, of course, means righteousness and this is at the heart of the salvation process. In the salvation of men, righteousness is given by imputation—He who perfectly kept the law imputes His righteousness to believers for their salvation. But once saved, the law takes on a different dimension, according to *Theonomy*. It now becomes both the pattern and the rule of life, with obedience a *must*—by the power of the Holy Spirit, of course.

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like saying there is one mathematical system governing the universe and even those who know nothing of mathematics are nevertheless governed by universal mathematical laws operating in every sphere of life.

What can we say to all this? To comment in detail on this enormous mass of exegesis, research and argumentation (over 600 pages of intricate scholarship) would take as much time and work as research for the average doctorate. One is well-nigh intimidated by just reading *Theonomy*, let alone setting out to critique it.

However, at the heart of all that material there are just one or two basic ideas and these can be isolated and discussed.

One of these ideas is that when the Bible speaks of the continuing applicability of God's law, it means every bit of the Mosaic code—not the *ceremonial* part, for this was fulfilled in Christ, but the moral, ethical and penal part.

The other principal idea is that both the prescriptive and the penal codes of the Old Testament are equally binding upon believers and unbe-

lievers—upon pagan states as well as "Christian" states.

It is in these two principal respects that Bahnsen offers a unique thesis. Without these two parts, his thesis would be just another expression of classic Reformed thought and *Theonomy* would have been unnecessary. The very fact that Bahnsen himself argues against other views of law in relation to grace is the clearest sign that he intends to say something *different*.

Especially significant are the passages in *Theonomy* that argue against a *general* approach to God's law, or an allegorical (or spiritual) interpretation of difficult Mosaic passages.

Bahnsen obviously thinks he is proposing something *new*. So *Theonomy* cannot be judged by its agreement with classic Reformed views. It must be judged by those very suggestions that go beyond.

Therefore, when the author quotes the Westminster Confession (XIX, 5) and says, in effect, "That is what I am saying!"—he really is not. If it

(Continued on p. 18, col. 2)

What Is an Offense?

WILLIAM C. ROBINSON

With respect to Church discipline, what is an offense? This question has vitally concerned the Presbyterian Church during its entire history.

According to Matthew 15:1-9, the Lord Jesus rebuked the Church leaders for making void the Word of God by their traditions: "In vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men."

In the fourth book of his *Institutes*, Calvin addressed this subject: "The power of the Church is not infinite, but subject to the Lord's Word, and as it were enclosed in it" (VIII, 4). "God deprives men of the capacity to put forth new doctrines in order that

He alone may be our schoolmaster in spiritual doctrine as He alone is true (Rom. 3:4), who can neither lie nor deceive" (VIII, 9).

Again, "The authority of the Church is attached to the Word, and we do not allow it to be separated from it" (VIII, 13). Finally, "In His law the Lord has included everything applicable to the perfect rule of the good life so that nothing is left to man to add to that summary" (X, 7).

Likewise, the Westminster Confession declares, God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, if these are in any way contrary to His Word or beside it in matters of faith and worship (XXII, 2). In 1787-89, when the first Presbyterian General Assembly in America was organized, that declaration came first in the Preliminary Principles. In

the seventh of these affirmations, it was expounded thus:

"All church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no Church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of its own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God."

Nearly one hundred years later, J. H. Thornwell of South Carolina presented to the 1859 and 1860 General Assemblies of the undivided Church a revised *Book of Church Order* which limited an offense strictly to that which Scripture condemns. As a result of the Southern separation, this revised book was never

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enacted by the Presbyterian Church USA.

The Presbyterian Church US appointed first Dr. Thornwell and later his disciples, such as Professors J. B. Adger of Columbia Seminary and Thomas E. Peck of Union, to draw up the PCUS *Book of Church Order*. It was adopted in 1879. Dr. Adger wrote, "In respect to Church discipline, an offense, the proper object of that discipline, is nothing but what the Word of God condemns as sinful."

This concept has dominated the thinking of the PCUS ever since. Our present *BOCO* declares, "The sole functions of the Church are to proclaim, to administer and to enforce the law of Christ, revealed in Scripture. The exercise of Church power has the divine sanction only when in conformity with the Word."

But today, the Plan for Reunion between the PCUS and the UPCUSA rejects this definition, and instead substitutes the following: "An offense is any act or omission by a member or officer of the church which is contrary to the Scriptures or the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*" (3.10.7).

The PCUS Presbytery of Atlanta accepted a minister who said he could not in good conscience ordain a woman as an elder, in view of his understanding of such Scriptures as I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. The support of both his congregation and the presbytery stood despite appeals to the higher judicatories.

But a similar case went differently in the UPCUSA which has defined an offense in essentially the same way as that proposed in the Plan for Reunion. The UPCUSA Presbytery of Pittsburgh voted to ordain a candidate who held similar reservations on ordaining women. On appeal, the General Assembly reversed the presbytery on the ground that presbytery's reception of this candidate was contrary to the Constitution of the Church.

In a hypothetical case, suppose a congregation elects as an elder the highly esteemed father and head of a family, husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that rules well his own

house, having his children in subjection with all gravity and having a good report of them that are without (I Tim. 3:1-9).

Suppose that after prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and after reading the Scriptural qualifications for an elder, the congregation chooses this head of a family instead of an 18-year-old who has been pushed for that eldership by the presbytery's Committee on Representation as provided in the Plan for Reunion (2.71.6-9). This committee is directed to give "special attention to the representation of younger members, twenty-five and under."

The congregation believes that it has followed the guidance of God, through the Holy Spirit shining upon God's Word which admonishes the Church to select "not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (I Tim. 3:6).

Yet under the definition of an offense in the Plan for Reunion which becomes part of the Constitution of the proposed new unified Church, this congregation would be subject to rebuke and its election set aside as null and void on the ground that they have not given "special attention to younger members" and so have acted "contrary to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)." And

Is the principle . . . "one person, one vote," the architectonic principle of Presbyterianism?

all because they acted according to the Word of God as the Holy Spirit led them to understand it. If this occurs, then it would be true that "for the sake of your tradition you have made void the Word of God" (Matt. 15:6).

That leaves us with this question: Is the principle of representation, "one person, one vote," the architectonic principle of Presbyterianism? The ministry constitutes less than one per

cent of our membership, yet it has 50 per cent of the votes in the higher courts and more than 50 per cent influence.

Moreover, even the Plan for Reunion asks in one breath "for fair representation of women," and in the next breath for a disproportionately large representation of ethnic minorities in the higher echelons. The plan also calls for appointment of committees on representation to receive

A congregation may be rebuked for not electing "minority" or young elders.

guidance from caucuses of the ethnic minorities and recommend to the courts "needed corrective actions" against congregations which do not choose elders from these ethnic minorities.

Of course, congregational nominating committees ought to be on the lookout from every ethnic group for persons "of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). But to have committees on representation from higher courts whose sole business is to press into the eldership persons because their cardinal qualification is youth, femininity or ethnic origin, can only weaken the strong sessions who have stood as the pillar and ground of the truth.

Historically, Presbyterianism has recognized the headship and lordship of Christ over His body by endeavoring to govern His Church according to His Word as given in the Bible. In both the Old and New Testaments, God has provided that His people be governed by elders or presbyters, esteemed fathers and heads of families, all the members of which, including wives and young people, they represent.

In matters of discipline these elders act as assembled in courts or presbyteries. If the Plan for Reunion nullifies this essential feature of Presbyterianism, will the body united under it continue to be a Presbyterian Church? [1]