**The Importance of a Strong Relationship with Christ**

**When We Speak or Write about Theology**

This workshop will examine the importance of maintaining a strong personal relationship with Christ whenever we are entrusted with the responsibility to teach theology to God’s people through speaking or writing. The workshop will consider biblical warnings against honoring God with our lips while our hearts are far from him, and will also examine examples (from Scripture and church history) of some leaders who were faithful and some who were unfaithful in this weighty responsibility.

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A. Teaching and writing about theology is a weighty responsibility.

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. (Jas. 3:1-2)

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Cor. 10:12)

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb. 13:17)

Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:26-27)

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. (1 Cor. 4:1-5)

B. Beware of a danger: you can teach harmful, destructive things and still attract followers who will praise you.

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. (2 Pet. 2:1-2)

C. We need Christ’s continuing presence and power to keep us faithful and enable us to bear abundant fruit in his kingdom

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5)

who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet. 1:5)

1. To keep us from theological error
2. To guide us to use our time wisely
3. To know what topics and projects to devote our attention to, for the advancement of God’s kingdom and that God may be more glorified
4. Example: are you spending too much time attempting to answer the views of liberal scholars who do not think that the Bible is the word of God? (somebody has to do this, but not everybody)
5. Example: It is God calling you to start an organization? Organizations often have impact that is wider and longer-lasting than that of individuals.
6. To have good judgment
7. To help us to gain a platform and a position of influence
8. To enable us to have the spiritual strength to pay a price, if necessary, for remaining faithful

7. To give us enough days to finish our work

When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish. (Ps. 146:4)

D. Among those teaching erroneous doctrines, a common factor is a scholar who has lost his love for Christ and does not have a vital daily fellowship with him

Charles Hodge - Princeton Seminary (1820-1878) Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature (and later of Systematic Theology): (Princeton - that time - center of solid, orthodox belief in Bible and all it teaches): in Germany, 1826-1828:

After two years of study in Europe, Hodge returned to Princeton in 1828 and in his introductory lecture asked how it was that in the former great centers of Protestantism -- especially Germany -- Christianity had ceased to be even the nominal religion? Hodge said the cause was the decline of "vital religion" . . .

"Holiness is essential to the correct knowledge of divine things and the great security from error . . . . Wherever you find vital piety, there you find the doctrines of the fall, of depravity, of regeneration, of atonement, and of the deity of Jesus Christ." Hodge then exhorted seminary students, "keep your hearts with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life . . . . Holiness is essential to correct knowledge of divine things, and the great security from error . . . . When men lose the life of religion, they can believe the most monstrous doctrines, and glory in them." (David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Vol.1: Faith and Learning, 1812 - 1868* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1994, p. 123)

E. Habits and practices found in Scripture that can strengthen our personal relationship with Christ

1. Keeping a clear conscience

holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith (1 Tim. 1:19)

1. Continual awareness of accountability to God

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

(Prov. 15:3)

1. Seeking God’s favor on our work

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands! (Ps. 90:17)

1. Practicing the Lord’s presence

I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken (Ps. 16:8)

1. Caring for your family

They made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept! (Song 1:6)

-- text for sermon by Harold John Ockenga, Park Street Church, Boston, 1970

6. Caring for personal health

Sleep: It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. (Ps. 127:2)

Exercise

Food

1. Humility, not being quarrelsome

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (1 Pet. 5:5)

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, (2 Tim. 2:24-25)

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. (Jas. 3:17)

1. Contentment with the ministry that God has entrusted to you

Moses to Levites who were not priests: “And would you seek the priesthood also?” (Num. 16:10)

F. My personal experience: things I have found helpful

1. Regular time of Bible reading and prayer each morning before I begin my work

2. Regular participation in a small group of Christians who pray together

3. Faithful membership in a Bible-believing local church

4. A group of “prayer partners” to whom I send email updates about my work

- for about 30 years

- confidential, by invitation only

5. Listening to worship music

6. Small prayers throughout the day

pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17)

7. In desire to be a “vessel for noble use” and not to lose God’s favor on my ministry

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. 21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. (2 Tim. 2:20-21)