

Confessions of a Berean Five Point Calvinist 03/28/2000

Theological intense questions were an early part of my Christian walk. As a babe in Christ, I first purchased Strong's "Systematic Theology" which at once began to challenge my private concepts of who God is and how he moves amongst his creation. The fundamentals of the faith were imbedded into my conscience at the church I attended regularly of Plymouth Brethren descent.

I remember being Petrine in my apprehension of truth. I questioned everything I came to love and adore later on in my more mature years as a believer. In a sense therefore, what I did learn the hard way has been eked out through long and laborious times of learning. When one comes to truth this way, doubt no longer haunts as a persistent thorn.

Of course, now I realize, there is no other process which fits the scriptural mode. Many become weary when even thinking of spending six months to a year, researching biblical answers when confronted with certain Pauline truth.

But, being true to God, the scripture and my own gnawing search for solid answers, I began to put my mouth where my wallet was. It was 1973 and the town was Denver Colorado. There was an excellent book store there which operated under the name of "Christian Discount Bookstore". Few Christian bookstores today could ever hope to attain such satisfaction from its purveyors. This haven for the spiritually afflicted did not have religious junk cluttering its allies. It majored on Theology and huge sets of commentaries. There was not much one had to order or couldn't find. It was a beautiful place to start a library. Sometimes I felt sorry for the owners, because there was no way anyone was making much profit at those marked down prices. So, invest I did with no regrets.

One of my first spiritual lessons came through a very close brother in the Lord. As a matter of fact he was my first best friend as a new creation. In retrospect, the Lord used this individual to teach me a very important lesson in my first year as a disciple in training, never play "follow the leader"! No matter how impressed you may be.

There was a silent stirring of Pentecostalism in my first church. A girl started attending our fellowship who came from a Brethren background. She was charismatic but never told anyone. We found out later, that her intentions were to convert our little fellowship to Pentecostalism, secretly.

My best friend, Kit Payne, was attracted to her and began going to outside bible studies with her. These studies, or rather gatherings, were charismatic in content.

But he never said much about them, other than they were interesting and that he liked their new perspectives. Certain ones in the assembly were being plagued with various sins and temptations of the flesh. In 1972 and 1973, demon exorcism was a popular Christian topic and our fellowship was not immune.

I lived in a large house with as many as 12 other brothers in the Lord whom I considered spiritual. The house was divided into 5 or 6 small apartments that were all accessible from the inside. This made meals and inner fellowship easier.

There were usually several bible studies going on at our house in any given week. Everyone was very active, perhaps too active.

One night, Kit came home from one of these outside meetings with a rather odd story. He said a believer that night had a demon cast out of him. Everyone was a little floored. Some questioned the activity. Others marveled. I was more than a little dubious. Then a month later, Kit said that his problems concerning a certain sin had been alleviated that very evening. We all wanted to know how. He said that a demon of lust was exorcised from him at the meeting that night. I took him aside and interrogated him as if to say he may have been mistaken. But he assured me that it was real. I asked how he knew for sure and he said he smelled a strong sulfur like scent as the demon was expelled. Then it seemed as though a huge burden had been lifted from his soul. He also mentioned that he no longer had a temptation in those regards.

There were others that began to relate other so called phenomena's of the spirit. The elders held a general meeting to deal with this issue. They took a dispensational stand that the "sign gifts" were not for today and that no one was to associate with these kind of happenings. Most of their material was taken from the Scofield bible and other Brethren works. Many upheld their discernment about the matter. Some did not.

Other than this Pentecostal matter, I never heard any more teaching in that church about dispensations. That was the first and only mention. It was as if the elders only used this truth to deal with the outbreak at hand, and then simply shelved dispensationalism.

This was my first exposure to the doctrine. It seemed to handle the outbreak pretty well. It made sense to me. But for those who were already headlong into these oddities, they could not understand why it only applied for the early church and not for today.

Many years later I came to understand that the only time some church leaders ever teach the distinctions about Acts 2 dispensationalism, is to avoid charismatic fervor.

There simply is no other biblical refutation, which answers so conclusively and thus prevents the bizarre antics of Pentecostalism. This is why many top leaders of Pentecostalism over the decades have detested dispensationalism the most. Because it stifles their so called revivals dead in their tracks. They have admitted as much publicly.

The first time I heard of John Calvin, was at a Plymouth Brethren meeting held by S. Lewis Johnson in 1972. The text of that sermon was **2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:** I had just been saved several months earlier and was still in a haze of spiritual elation. The majority from our group that attended this service were in disagreement with much of the content that was Calvinistic. But as a babe in Christ, I didn't see what all the fluster was about. It made good sense to me from that point on. Of course, the particulars of the doctrine of election would not take shape in my own understanding for several years to come.

The next encounter with God's Sovereignty in my life was through the tape ministry of a church in Columbus Ohio, Riverside Bible Church. The preaching of their pastor was very unique. He taught verse by verse by exposition. But there was something else that stood out from the norm about his teaching. That was the rare gift and consistent ability to uplift the person of Christ while preaching. One would expect this to be the norm in overall Christianity, but not so!

Mid Acts dispensationalism was the first teaching that made a difference in my theology. For years the Sermon on the Mount was a perplexity to me. Many of the Plymouth brethren ministries were teaching a lot of life application from the Matthew 5-7 context. I had a problem seeing how I fit into that text. Personally I couldn't make my life fit. I tried to spiritualize such verses as **Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

The prevailing sense amongst many Brethren was it was more spiritual to be poor financially than to have things in this world. Insurance was one item that a certain brother frowned on. This sort of interpretation was construed from such passages as **Matthew 6:25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall**

eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life

more than meat, and the body than raiment? Matthew 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? Matthew 6:34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Now I know these verses are designed by interpretation for the Kingdom saints as they enter their hope on earth after we are raptured. But back then I was truly befuddled. It is amazing how many endure this confusion and turn from the truth. But that is exactly what Paul prophesized, 2 Tim. 4:3+4, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

Then I was swayed by this interpretation being ignorant of the truth of Pauline revelation. Yet there are some Christians who shrug off the responsibilities of coming to grips with certain teachings saying, “doctrine isn’t that important. It is better to live the life than study it.” I know now this sort of reasoning is simply not biblical. What a person believes about the Sermon on the Mount definitely does directly affect his life as it did with me in my first year as a believer!

In retrospect, there were many passages of common scripture which just didn’t add up in my life. The epistle of James was naturally another one. Luther also struggled here so that was comforting. But past men in the faith, though gifted by the Lord and men of esteem only satisfy temporarily. It is essential that each individual believer work out his own edification and interpretations for himself as he is instructed by the Holy Spirit on his own in the scriptures. Anything else results in a similar product as seen in 1 Corinthians 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? The pattern is always the same when we make a habit of accepting what someone else has said about an important doctrine. Paul says in chapter one of first Corinthians, verse ten, Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. The word, divisions, is the greek word *scisma*, schisma. It means a rent, or dissension. It is where we get our English word for schism.

What Paul was warning the Corinthian church of, has in fact been reproduced over the centuries since then, a myriad of times. It grieves the sincere at heart just to think of the trail of countless, and at times bloody, sects the body of Christ has illegitimately produced! We call it denominationalism. Why, it even sounds, evangelically, acceptable. Indeed, the religious flesh has perfected this misery to a mystical harmony, we call it Roman Catholicism. How many popes have ruled over the history of such catastrophes. How many mini popes have spread their wiles amongst the countless millions of uninstructed and careless believers of yesterdays gone by.

As this is being written, the BBF is in the midst of another split by it's elected head! The pattern is fixed even in the camps of "Bereans". For sure, these are the last days of the body of Christ. But, one wonders what it was like for Darby and his successor E.W. Bullinger! They as well must have suffered, living with continual rejection being branded a heretic by the majority of Christianity.

Such is life as we know it here and now that is. I was taking to S. Lewis Johnson while at his church in Dallas Texas recently, I asked him if he travels much anymore amongst the Plymouth churches. He lamented that, the brethren had black balled him from their circles shortly after he began teaching 5 point Calvinism. I thought to myself, you should try being both a mid acts dispensationalist, and at the same time a 5 pointer. But I held my peace. It's easy to feel sorry for yourself.

Sometimes it's not easy, but the truth also divides as well as unifies. Don't confuse this with 1 Corinthians one and two, that was carnality. Remember, our sword is honed on 2 sides. I often reflect that these sides represent Gods Sovereignty on one, and right division on the other. **Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful,** Thought, was the word of God always double edged? The tense in the greek is present tense [when Paul wrote Hebrews], uops, I spilled over, sorry. Not every good Berean believes that Paul wrote Hebrews.

What must it be like today for others who only have a one sided sword? Such as those arminian mid actsers. Contraire, those Calvinists who think most eschatology has already taken place? Then there are those without either side that is sharp, can we call that a club? Sometimes in discussions with such, it seems as though we are getting beat up. Praise God, are these the persecutions Paul is speaking of in **2 Timothy 3:12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.** Maybe partly.to be continued

