

The Stromata



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The Most Reliable

By Gary Browers

Do you know what's going to happen at exactly 7:36 tomorrow morning? The sun will rise! This is the only totally accurate piece of information meteorologists can ever forecast. Now, how does the meteorologist know for sure what time the sun will rise? How can they be so sure that the time they give is right? We never see them rating themselves on the accuracy of the sunrise, like they do the accuracy of snowfall. How do they know? Because it's happened before! For centuries, meteorologists have recorded when the sun appears and how it changes throughout the season. Based on this information, the meteorologist "predicts" that the sun will do what it has always been doing. Is the forecaster gullible? Are they taking chances when they do this? Of course not. In a world of changing weather, this fact is probably the most stable. We take it for granted. The fact is, it's one of the most important. Imagine if the forecasters were wrong, and the sun didn't come up at all. Then we would take notice. But, it always does. We've grown accustomed to it. We depend on it. It's part of our existence.

The only thing more reliable than the sun coming up every day, is the presence and care of God. In a world full of changing, shifting conditions, God is the only source of deliverance who will never let us down. In today's passage, we learn that God has been and always will be more reliable than anything else. Israel's world had been turned upside down. Thousands had been killed in wars. Thousands more had been shipped off to another country. The economy was in shambles. The political leaders were wimps, creating treaties with suspicious bedfellows. In a world of change, who could they count on? The answer: the same God who had always been there before and would continue to be there forever. The same God who has promised all of

His children, including us, that He would never leave us nor forsake us. He would be with us to the end of the age. We know this because this is how God has always acted. Just as we can rely on the sun because it has risen in the past, so we can rely on God because of His actions in the past."

What are these past actions, and what do they prove about God? Listen to God's call in verse 3:
"Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth..."

Hear the compassion and love in God's voice as He begins his words of promise. Who is the person who carries after conception? The mother. Who carries a baby after the birth? A parent. These are not words of anger. These are words more of wonder. In verses 3-5, God is somewhat astonished that His children would look anywhere else than to Him for deliverance. Imagine your child comes to you and questions your dependability. Your son asks, "Why exactly should I depend on you for my next meal? What qualifications do you hold which instill confidence in me?" After your initial shock, what would you say? "I brought you into this world. I changed your diapers. I gave you baths. I burped you. I fed you. I kissed your owies. I hugged you when you cried. When you were the most dependent, I was dependable." In the same way, God tells them that He is dependable. God has told them repeatedly what He has done, and these words summarize that. "I have taken you out of the land of Egypt". "I have called you in righteousness." "I have delivered you from the hands of your enemies." "I fed you in the desert." "I comforted you". Again and again, God has acted on behalf of His people. He has carried them. Verses 1,2 of this chapter describe the gods of Babylon as burdensome, things that slow them down. The people of Babylon need to carry them. In contrast, God is the one who is doing the carrying. If you want to see a detailed listing of how God

carried them, turn in your Bible to Psalm 136. Here's a detailed list of God's actions. If you want more, read the book of Deuteronomy. Moses spends a lot of time reminding Israel of what God has done. Actually, for us today, that is the purpose of the Bible. How has God acted in the past? What is He like? When we learn how God operates, we get to know Him. And when we know Him, we are able to depend on Him and imitate Him in our lifestyle. So, God brought His people out of Egypt. He provided food in the desert. He gave His people a home in Canaan. What has He done for you? Has He given you a home? Has He given you food? Has He healed you from sickness? Has He comforted you when you were sad? Has He reassured you when you were scared? More importantly, has He saved you through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Has He begun to change you into a person who looks like Him and acts like Him through the work of the Holy Spirit? Look, remember, what God has done, because, as we see in verse four, that makes all the difference.

Let's look at verse four:

Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Verse 3 shows God as the parent of Israel. Verse 4 says that God will take care of them into their golden years as well. Israel cannot outgrow God, even if they wanted to. Notice also that the two time frames which God describes are the two where humans are most needy. God kind of skips the middle, strong years. Compared to God, and without God, we have no middle strong years. We are always dependent on Him, our whole life. Verse four connects God's past actions to the promise of His future actions. And that is where all of our assurance rests. He has upheld and He will sustain. He has carried and He will carry. He has made and He will carry. The parent who has given life and care will continue to do so. As we discovered before,

God has done a lot for us. Now, based on that past experience, we can trust Him to continue to do so. God says in verse four, "I will sustain you and I will rescue you." Israel needed rescuing from Babylon. They had been rescued many times before, but they needed it again. God promised that He would, and history tells us that He did. We also need to be rescued from many things: poverty, hunger, fear, illness. But there is nothing we need to be rescued from more than ourselves, stuck in sin. In a moment, we will see God's attitude towards us as sinners. For now, there is great comfort in knowing that God has rescued us through Jesus and will rescue us from sin and temptation. Psalm 40:2 says that God has lifted us from the slimy pit and set our feet on the rock. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says that God will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. He has rescued and continues to rescue. His plan is to sanctify, to make His children pure. And Philippians 1:6 says "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." God does not give up. When He begins to purify His children, He will finish the task. Now, with the Israelites, there were times God wanted to give up. He had called them a stiff-necked, rebellious people. In Exodus, He was this close to wiping them out as a people. If Moses hadn't prayed for God's forgiveness, God would have destroyed them all. But Moses reminded God that He loved the Israelites. They were His children. And He saw them through to the end into Canaan. God does not give up. He carries out His work on His children. His promises are good. As He has said, so He will do.

For you parents, there is a wish that you would always be able to care for your children. You've looked at your child in their crib, and you've thought about the dangers that this little child will face. In your more idealistic moments, you say, "I will always protect you, little one." Yet, you know deep down that you won't always be able to protect your baby. But God is able to always protect His children. God is the only parent who is always

around. God is the only parent who is able to determine what happens to His children. What parent can compare to God? .

Not only is God capable and determined to see this through to the end. He is also the only one who could do so. And God makes very clear that it is He, and He alone who does this. In verse four, He says, "I am he. I will carry you. I will sustain you. I will rescue you." There are no other gods who could do what God does. There is nothing as dependable as God.

Which brings us to verse five.

"To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?"

Our God is unique. He is above any other concept of God that we could imagine, in several ways.

First, our God is the most powerful. He is Ruler over everything. God, by definition, is that person over whom nothing is greater. Our God, our Father, is the only one who has existed for eternity. Our Father is the only one who is all-knowing. Our Father is the only one who is everywhere at all times. Our Father is the only one who has ultimate power. How can we even compare anything to God? When we do, the thing we are comparing comes up so miserably short. Have you ever wondered why God felt so strongly about the second commandment, to not make an idol of Him? It's because it's an insult to even consider anything in comparison to Him. Suppose I did a comparison between you and a worm. What do you have in common with a worm? Nothing. It's an insult to even consider that. It's much greater an insult to consider anything in comparison to God. In Isaiah 55:8 God says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," and to suggest that our ways, or the ways of another source of care, are better is just plain insulting.

Suppose you are a parent. You're going out for the evening, and your baby-sitter comes over. You leave the instructions for your child's care, but they begin to tell you that your instructions are wrong. "The child doesn't need that much to eat! Oh, he doesn't need to be changed for at least 6 hours! Screaming is good for the baby!" Are you going to go out and have a good time? Are you going to go out at all? No way! There is no substitute for a parent's care, and to be told that you're wrong about your child is a huge insult. So it is with God. God made Israel. God made us. God took care of Israel. God takes care of us. Who could do better, and why would we even want to look for someone to do better? "To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?"

Second, our God is the only God who shows grace. A group of theologians gathered together once to discuss Christianity. They wanted to determine what made Christianity distinct from all other religions. They thought about the need to do good, or the need to repent, or the idea of a higher power. But most of the other religions contained these beliefs as well. At one point, C.S. Lewis came into the room, and they asked him what made Christianity different from the rest. He quickly answered, "Grace". God is the only God who shows grace to His children. When compared to the alternatives, this alone is enough to make God incomparable. You see, as God says here that He has carried His children in the past, there is the knowledge that those children have not always willingly been carried. The children of Israel have been bad. We have been bad. They, and we, have not obeyed the Father. Again and again for hundreds of years, we have run away from God to other sources of comfort and care. The Israelites turned to a human king in 1 Samuel. They turned to idols in the book of Judges. They turned to political alliances in 2 Kings. Again and again, the Israelites thought that they had found a better source. We

try what we think are better sources, too. And again and again, we find out that the better source was unreliable. We end up in trouble, and God save in His grace. For the Israelites, God's grace had its limit, eventually. But His grace lasted almost a thousand years. What other god would do that? Today, when we seek grace from money, we end up with bad credit. When we seek grace from employers, we might end up with a notice, or even lose our job. God's grace is the only reliable source of grace." To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?"

Third, as a result of this grace, our God is the only God who came to man, rather than man coming to Him. All other sources of deliverance have human beings chasing after them. For Buddhists, it's Buddha. For Hindus, it's karma. For those who rely on money, it's the next shift in the market. For those who rely on power, it's the next election or promotion. But when it comes to God, He is the one who did the chasing. Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The poet Francis Thompson has called God "the hound of heaven". It is God who comes looking for us, starting already in the garden when He comes looking for Adam, and continuing today, seeking to save the lost, as Jesus came to do. Why, then, would we consider any other God, and what else can compare to God. "To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?"

Now, His children live in a way which reflects His dependability. The Israelites needed to learn to rely on God for their existence. Their past actions had not shown they could do this. But now, maybe, they would remember that it was God, it had always been God, who delivered them. There was never another. The questions was, would they remember? Would they look

to Him, and depend on His reliability? Would they remember the times He had delivered them in the past? The answer is... Yes, this time they would. But again they would forget, after they had once again been saved. And this time, God dispersed them among the nations.

The question is the same for us. Will we remember? We look to Him and depend on His reliability? Will we remember the times He has delivered us in the past? Whether we do or not will make all the difference. When we're thinking about our retirement, and the stock market drops out, will we remember? If we don't, loss of money can lead to despair and fear. We've heard of stories about stock brokers who have committed suicide over a drop in the market. If we do remember, we will live in peace, knowing that God doesn't concern Himself with stock prices, or interest rates. His concerns are much higher. And, as David says in Psalm 37, "I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." The point is not that we shouldn't invest. The point is that we shouldn't look to it for our deliverance.

Or when we're watching the elections this year. Will our candidate win? Will "God's candidate" win? What if our idea of "God's candidate" is not the winner? What if everything the next president stands for goes against what God says is right? Will we remember? Will we remember that God has already won the war between good and evil? Will we remember that the nations are like one small drop in a bucket; they are no more than the dust on his measuring scales, like Isaiah says? If we don't remember, we will lose heart. We will fear the worst. We will be defeated. We will see the unsaved as the enemy, and we will miss chances to be witnesses for God. If we do remember, we will see God's hand move in wonderful ways. We will trust that His will will be done on this earth. We will know that God NEVER loses. And we will look for opportunities to serve Him.

We will do so in love, and not in fear or anger. We will see the unsaved as victims of their own blindness, rather than the enemy to be fought.

Or when we're thinking about more important matters, namely our salvation. Will we remember that God has rescued and saved us when the devil tells us we're not worthy to ask for forgiveness? Have you experienced this? When you've done something you think is too bad for God to forgive? Do you hear the logic of the devil's statement? He's sticking up for God! He's saying that God is too good for us! He's pretending to be on God's side! That's not right! Remember, God has delivered us. He has definitely done this, and He will continue to do this. And He has said that He is faithful to forgive when we repent. Or how about when we're being tempted. It seems like there is no way out. It seems like we will inevitably sin. But remember! Remember that God has promised a way out. He has delivered in the past, and He will deliver in the future. And there is nothing more effective against temptation than when it leads you to remember God's promises. When the devil does something to remind you of the goodness of God, he hates that, and nothing makes him quit faster!

A child of God who remembers his Father's reliability is one who lives in peace and confidence. When a person is grounded on God's reliability, nothing can shake them. God has proven His dependability in all areas of life. If He has been dependable, He will continue to be dependable. He's said so. And He's proven so.

So, what will you do? There are many distractions in the world, claiming to be dependable. We've heard the advertisements... "You're in good hands with..." "When it absolutely, positively, has to be there overnight..." "Get a piece of the rock". Will you rely on the distractions that so easily disappoint, or will you rely on the God who is shown over and over again to be the most reliable?"

Gary Brouwers

Gary Brouwers, is currently a Middler at Calvin Seminary. Until January 1999, he worked as a youth pastor in a Christian Reformed church a little north of Grand Rapids. He began there in 1990, and after nine years, realized God's call on his life to become a minister. About this sermon he says: "I think this sermon is timely at any point of our lives because life is uncertain at all times. Last year, it was the Y2K fear. This year, at the time of this writing, the future is uncertain as the United States awaits the results of its presidential election. Who knows what next year's uncertainty will be. He is unrivaled in His grace and power. Catching a fresh glimpse of this on a regular basis helps us to live in gratitude and submission to our faithful Father."



ON HUMAN FREEDOM AND DIGNITY
Where Film and Comic Strip Aid
Theological Treatise
By Ken Vander Horst



What is freedom? Though thousands have sacrificed themselves in pursuit of it, freedom is not easily defined. It is personal? Is it corporate? Is freedom a phenomenon unique to humanity, or is freedom something that all creatures long to taste? No serious discussion of any of these questions can easily answer any of these questions. Freedom is so nebulous, and yet so tantalizing that each generation and every civilization strives unto death to define as well as to possess it.

Ask ten people what freedom is, and you will get ten different answers. For a child, freedom may mean a belly full of Kellogg's Sugar Corn Pops and a mind stimulated by three hours of Saturday morning cartoons. For a teen, freedom may be defined as "being able to do

what you want when you want and where you want." For an adult (assuming difference from the child's and the teen's idea), freedom may be having a bank account balance exceed one's intended amount of lifetime expenses, so as to enable one to tell the boss to "take this job and shove it." For the prisoner, freedom means walking out of the cell for the last time.

While people tend to define freedom according to their own situation, and dictionaries offer varying definitions, there is a common thread in most everyone's understanding. The universal sense is that to be free is to be exempt or independent of untoward outside influence. Given the history of humanity's (unsuccessful?) quest for genuine and lasting freedom, one wonders: is freedom possible?

I propose that to be genuinely human requires that one accept that one can never be genuinely free in the universal sense of the word. I defend my proposal with the aid of two apt comic strips.

The first is already legendary. Western Civilization has been graced by the humour and truth telling character of Calvin, who, with his sidekick Hobbes, ponders life in philosophical proportions while wearing clothing of childlike proportions. In this short episode, we see what it is that humans tend towards when possessing liberty.

The point that Calvin's creator is making is that to be human is to enslave oneself. The testimony of Scripture agrees -- humanity was given the choice of being enslaved to the Creator by means of the Creator's design or rules for the creation, or being enslaved to the creatures' own design for themselves in rebellion against the Creator. The movie *The Matrix* presents that same basic choice. The main character, Neo, when presented with the choice of two pills, is forced to choose between being enslaved to

"The Matrix" or to Morpheus, an intelligent and powerful human who knows more than he is willing to tell Neo. C.S. Lewis see this basic choice as having to do with human progress. As humanity "progresses", it constantly tries to overcome the reality of being enslaved to nature. Yet, "Man's conquest of Nature turns out, in the moment of consummation, to be Nature's conquest of Man." Ultimately, we are "the slaves and puppets of that to which we have given our souls."

Some would argue that my contention that humanity only chooses between enslavement to its Creator and enslavement to its own design is false. While the writers of The Matrix would agree with me that we are all born into some form of slavery (they use the term "bondage"), they argue that human freedom is attained in "a world without boundaries, rules, and control, where anything is possible." In other words, when one chooses one's own way -- a way without outside influence -- one is free. I respond with another comic, this time from the well known Hi & Lois strip: 5

As the strip suggests, no boundaries or constraints makes for a very dull existence. Parents well know that when their children have "limitless" time (such as on Christmas or summer vacation from school), uneasiness results from the structurelessness that a vast quantity of time offers them.

Again, the testimony of Scripture is telling. When humanity was created and placed in the garden of Eden, the Creator was careful to instruct humanity with respect to its limitations. Humanity did not possess the kind of freedom that came from a "world without boundaries, rules, and control, where anything is possible." The Creator set abundantly clear boundaries by means of two trees placed in the middle of the garden. One was the tree of life, and

one was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One tree's fruit was strictly forbidden; one tree's fruit was not. The author of Genesis goes on to tell that humanity transgressed the boundaries set by the Creator, and paid the enormous price of being banished from the garden, humanity's true home in the presence of the Creator. Humanity sought total freedom and independence from the Creator, but such a condition was not really possible. Lewis echoes this enslaved and limited condition of humanity when he writes "the human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour, or indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in." I would add a new status as a creature free from its Creator.

Advocates of freedom, including freedom from the constraint of the Creator's boundaries, might note the date this paper is due, and see that this argument was forged during my Christmas break. They may then dismiss my claims as feeble attempts at rationalizing my decision to write essays during a time that most wisely choose not to.

While I do not deny that I tend towards enslaving myself during holiday and vacation periods by taking work with me (laudamus laptopus!), I maintain that humanity, by virtue not only of its rebelliousness from the Creator's design, but also by virtue of its status as creature, is always a slave. The only way to be liberated from the hell of anti-normative enslavement, is when you enslave yourself to the Redeemer -- the one who "liberates" humanity and delivers it back to the Creator.

How is this recreated design different from humanity's rebellious design for itself? The apostle describes it in this way: "It is for freedom that you have been set free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve." (Galatians 5:13)

Following the ultimate servant, the one who serves as the Redeemer, is the only means of regaining the dignity due to humanity. Though for some it is a bitter pill to swallow, it is the only way to "have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10)

Ken Vander Hoorst

Ken is a third year M.Div student. He will be in residence for four years at Calvin Seminary, as he interns concurrently as youth director at Seymour CRC in Grand Rapids. Ken and his wife Marg and son Avery hail from Smithers, British Columbia in Canada, but Ken grew up near Forest in southwestern Ontario.

His submitted paper was written for SYS TH 421 (Doctrine of Humanity). Through Professor John Bolt's invitation to write on human freedom in light of C.S. Lewis' Abolition of Man and the recent film The Matrix, Ken was inspired to write "On Human Freedom and Dignity -- Where Film and Comic Strip Meet Scripture and Theological Treatise".



On the Road

By Dave Gifford

"I couldn't help noticing your animated discussion. May I listen in?"

The two seminarians had not realized how intense their voices had become, nor had they noticed the stranger walking behind them as they wandered toward the dorms after a long day of studies. Slightly embarrassed, but always willing to add new sparring partners to the give-and-take of theological banter, they obliged him by separating slightly, allowing him to partially wedge himself between them.

"Thank you. Now, what are you talking about?" he asked.

"Well," said the first seminarian, eager to patronize his new companion, "Tim and I were discussing the balance between theory and practice in our seminary curriculum. Should we students spend most of our time learning more about abstract things such as Greek and Hebrew, textual criticism and church history, or should we concentrate on learning preaching skills, administration, marketing-the 'tricks of the ministerial trade', so to speak? My opinion is that the church community exists primarily as a byproduct of the apostolic message. Miscommunication, tradition and historical conditionedness have distorted the true gospel over the centuries. We must lovingly and carefully scrub away the layers of grime that have accumulated on top of that gospel. Only in this way will we be able to fully grasp and faithfully communicate the true message of Jesus and his first followers. But this requires academic rigor and scientific inquiry. If we are committed to excellence we will set aside our

cultural and doctrinal blinders, so that our churches will have a solid theoretical foundation upon which to stand. The church cannot offer society a gospel that ignores the mind."

"But Brian, while you lock yourself in your ivory tower, the church's needs continue," the second seminarian

quickly replied. "In addition to knowing how to perform church services, marriages, baptisms, etc, in a professional and warm manner, today's pastor needs to be equipped with contemporary church growth principles. People are leaving the churches. They need to be enticed to return, by creating more dynamic worship, more relevant preaching, and programs that meet their needs. We live in a fast-paced, visual, online culture, and the average person doesn't want all your abstract scholarship. She wants to know how to raise her children and to know she is accepted by God and others. Time in seminary is far better spent understanding our culture and the means by which we can target it and meet its needs."

The latecomer raised his finger. "May I make a few comments?" Both students indicated their openness, while inwardly groaning, anticipating the untutored clichés of a 'layman.' The stranger began his exposition. Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Jesus Christ. The students were spellbound as he spun his cosmic tale. Their shoes beat their normal rhythm on the campus pavement, but in their minds they soared, as if he had taken them to the high point of the temple and had shown them the kingdoms of the earth. And as he spread the vast panorama of salvation history before them, they could hear a voice whisper within them, "All this I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me." Suddenly the mental mattress upon which they floated was punctured by the sharp points and subpoints of their textbooks, and they returned to reality from their momentary dream, never wondering if perhaps it was the other way around.

They waited for the stranger to come to a pause, and the first seminarian cleared his throat for attention.

"That's what fundamentalists like Tim here would have you believe. But it's simply untenable that Jesus rose from the dead. We are dealing with stories produced by the early Christian communities as they struggled with the meaning of their faith in the context of per-

secution. The question is not whether it happened. Clearly it did not. The true question is, how did the early church understand it, and what application can we draw from it?"

"Both of you are focusing on history and truth," his classmate replied, "and you are both stuck in ancient Palestine. This is the twenty-first century. Your story, sir, certainly seems biblical enough. I commend you that you haven't fallen for the liberal German nonsense my friend gobbles for breakfast. But it's simply too complicated and time-consuming a story to convey in our age of ten second soundbytes and instant Internet access. Most people don't have the attention span necessary to try to digest all that. That's why experts on worship recommend shorter sermons and the importance of music and drama. On top of that, what you say is very demanding. The average consumer-I mean attendee-will be turned off by your directness and your high expectations. We dare not turn anyone away."

Downhearted, the stranger lowered his voice and sighed, "What good is it to dig for buried treasure, if you do not believe you will ever find it? And what good is it to reach out to others, if you have nothing in your hands to offer them?"

As they reached the entrance drive to the dorms, the stranger made as if to continue on his way, and the students noticed their impropriety. "I'm sorry. We've been very rude. We didn't even ask you your name. Would you like to come in for a moment? We have coffee and donuts waiting inside."

The stranger politely pretended to refuse, but the seminarians did not want to offend him by insisting. He continued down the street casually, as if to look for new conversation partners.

Tim turned to Brian and said, "Okay, this is strange, but weren't our hearts burning when he talked to us, revealed to us, about scripture?"

"Yes, I suppose," Brian responded, "but we both have a lot of homework to do. Let's get inside."

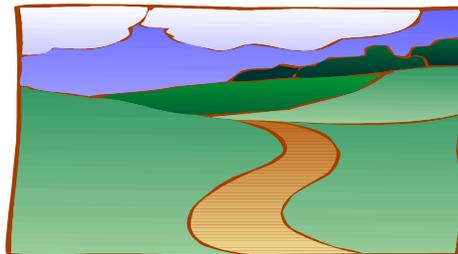
And they never saw the stranger again.

Dave Gifford

Dave Gifford was raised in Wyoming, MI, and became a Christian in 1981 through the influence of friends in the public high school he attended. After high school he attended Reformed Bible College, graduating in 1990. From 1994 to 1999 he and his wife served as church planting missionaries in Ecuador. It is here that he felt the calling to the ministry.

After his studies at Calvin Seminary he would like to pursue a doctorate, with the goal of teaching and producing a new generation of materials which help people understand the Bible and theology better.

This particular story came about as a response to a writing contest at Calvin College last year. It called for a short story based on themes found in the Emmaus Road narrative. Dave says that: "Instead, I ended up writing a story which uses that narrative (and language from Jesus' temptation narrative) to explore the pros and cons of both sides of an entirely different issue. Since that issue is a central concern for the seminary, Stromata seemed an appropriate place for this story."



The Meaning of Ordination

By Mike Van Boom

The question of ordination in the church is not a new one. It has developed and changed throughout church history, and has often been the cause of major controversy. In the last few years, new issues have come to the fore that again challenge our understanding of Ordination. This topic deals with what it means when ministers of the church are chosen to be ordained in the church and what their status implies. To explore this issue, this report will examine where our conception of ordination comes from. To that end, it will explore the biblical sources for this concept, the historical development of ordination in the church, and will acknowledge historical and contemporary understandings of it in the church.

The English verb *ordain* can be traced back to the Latin *ordo*, which translates the Greek noun meaning: fixed succession or order, in an orderly manner, position/post, nature, condition or appearance. The verb *ordain* is used commonly in English versions, particularly the King James Version. However, this verb does not have any direct Greek or Hebrew equivalent. The meaning of this verb in English, according to the Oxford dictionary, is to appoint ceremonially to Christian Ministry; to destine or appoint; or to appoint authoritatively, decree or enact. Our contemporary understanding and use of this word is rooted strongly in its use in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. In the KJV, the word *ordain* occurs fifteen times in the Old Testament and twenty times in the New Testament. Of the fifteen times in the Old Testament “five of these occurrences have to do with appointing a man to some kind of specific task; these five instances, however, are translations of four different Hebrew words.” In the KJV New Testament the word *ordain* occurs twenty times. Eight of these refer to situations regarding ecclesiastical functionaries, but of these eight occurrences, five are completely different Greek verbs. Thus, our use of the word *ordain* sits upon a very fragmented Biblical foundation.

The Greek verbs translated to mean *ordain* in the KJV include those meaning: to put, set, place, to make someone something, put in charge, appoint; to set down, to put in place, to set in an elevated position, to appoint; to show hands; or to choose. In general, the word is used in reference to the appointment of someone to a specific duty. However, there are many and varied nuances to the use of these different words. Some are quite compatible with our idea of ordination, others do not fit well, particularly with our conception of Church office. These uses can indicate a more general appointment of believers to spiritual callings such as, possession of certain spiritual gifts, tongues, and gifts of service. However, each of the different verbs used played a strong role in shaping our view of ordination.

In addition to these literary accounts of appointment to some position, there are also two major Biblical ceremonies that have played a role in shaping our understanding of ordination. These are *Anointing* and *Laying on of Hands*. Both of these ceremonies are widely used to describe the setting aside of people for specific ecclesiastical tasks. Therefore, it is appropriate for us to understand and analyze these biblical practices because they are similar to our practice of ordination and have helped shape our understanding of it. An analysis of these two ceremonies, therefore, will hopefully give us some further insight into what ordination means.

In the Old Testament, both people and things were anointed with oil. This rite communicated a special setting aside for exclusive service to the Lord. "In the Old Testament the impression is left that the anointing conferred something upon the anointed which he did not have before." When Priests were anointed, they became responsible for the basic duties, rights and privileges of the priesthood. The anointing of a King signified that the anointed one had been sovereignly chosen by the Lord. In some cases, this was accompanied by a pouring out of the Spirit of the Lord. The Hebrew word most commonly used to mean anointing is *mashach*. This is the word from which Messiah has been derived.

However, the word is not always used literally. In some cases there is no record of a physical anointing process. This suggests that the reality symbolized by the act of anointing was far more important in the minds of the ancient writers than the symbol itself.

The Old Testament view of anointing is picked up strongly in the New Testament. However, in the New Testament only Christ is referred to as *the Anointed One*. "Nowhere in the New Testament do we read that apostles, evangelists, deacons or others were anointed for their specific offices." Instead, the New Testament refers to all believers as being anointed. This general anointing of all believers is tied closely to the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Anointing's role in the New Testament has some important ramifications for our understanding of ordination. First, only Christ carries the specific office of Anointed One. He is our only High Priest and our Eternal King. Second, all believers share an anointing by the Holy Spirit. So, we cannot understand ordination as an anointing to a specific office. "There is no New Testament instruction for the church to anoint those who have been anointed to special tasks or office within the Christian community." Despite the lack of specific New Testament references to anointing of people to specific offices in the church, the Biblical concept of anointing has shaped how the church developed its view of ordination. The concept of anointing affects our understanding of ordination because it highlights the chosen-ness and special calling of people to specific works in the service of God's people. However, the New Testament is not an ally of ordination as anointing. The New Testament understanding of anointing reinforces the belief in the priesthood of all believers, but does not give us a biblical basis for ordination as anointing to specific offices within the church.

The Laying on of hands is also an important biblical principle and continues to be a part of our ordination practice today. In the Old Testament Laying on of hands signified a blessing, designating a representative

or substitute, or indicating a succession. The Jewish Priesthood, the Levites, had hands laid on them. This signified that they were substitution for and representative of the first-born of Israel. In this way, they were offered to the Lord in place of the first-born of Israel. In Numbers 27, Moses laid hands on Joshua. This showed Israel that Moses was choosing Joshua as his successor.

The New Testament has several instances of the laying on of hands, all of which bear similar characteristics to the instances in the Old Testament. Several of these examples were public ceremonies appointing someone to carry out certain duties and functions. In Acts 13:3, Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to go on a journey. The community of Antioch laid hands on them signifying that they were to be representatives of the community. "The passage in Acts 13, therefore, is an "ordination" in the sense of an appointment to represent one's fellow Christians, and to perform certain duties in their behalf." In the same way, Timothy's ordination by the laying on of hands by both Paul and the presbytery was giving Timothy a representative role in that community.

These two ceremonies, laying on of hands and anointing, played a major role in how the church began to understand ordination. However, neither of these ceremonies provides an adequate rule or pattern for ordination. Anointing is seen to reach its fullness in Christ as *the Anointed One* and in the general anointing of all believers in the Holy Spirit. The ceremony of the Laying on of hands symbolizes the appointment of a person as a representative to act on behalf of the group, or perhaps to do a certain task. Neither ceremony set forth an established pattern of appointment to ordained office, but as the church grew, these biblical concepts did play an important role in shaping the church's understanding of ordination.

The church in the first century began with a very simple and casual structure of ministry. According to Biblical evidence, there appeared to be no distinction

between clergy and laity. The church was a kingdom of priests. As a result of this, the church did not call its leaders priests. Every believer was a priest. Thus, any ordaining activity was in a sense over and above the general priesthood of all believers. Ministers were set apart to their task by the laying on of hands. This carried the significance of appointment as representative. Ordination was a public recognition of one's having and exercising the gifts of ministry. By laying hands on them, the church community was appointing them as representatives to use those gifts for and on behalf of the community. The conception of church office during this time placed a distinct emphasis on servant-hood. This modeled Christ's mandate. Any leadership position within the community was seen as a servant to that community. This also affected how an ordained leader was viewed and functioned in the community.

In the beginning, the church experienced a diverse expression of church organization. After a time, however, a set pattern began to emerge. The church began to develop standard doctrine and worship practices. The church's ministry and organization became much more formal. As the church moved into the second century, the office of bishop began to emerge.

By the middle of the century the office of bishop constituted the principal form of leadership in the church. "The bishop was a symbol of both unity and doctrinal purity." The office of Bishop was a necessary development at this time. The church was struggling with the threat of various heresies. The bishop provided a court of appeal for the church, and helped to define and defend correct doctrine. As a result of the establishment of this office, an order of ranking appeared. The bishop presided over the elders or pastors and was assisted by the deacons. The authority vested in bishops played a necessary role in the early church, but it had adverse affects on the structure of the church and its view of ordination.

Following the end of the first century, The office of Bishop began to have increasingly more authority. As a

result, their role in performing the ordination ceremony grew. The ceremony of laying on of hands, was always a joint venture by the congregation and a church leader, but the growing authority of the bishop began to cause his approval and endorsement of the candidate to become much more important. The emphasis on the bishop's role never did fully eliminate the role of the congregation (their vote was still required to ordain someone), but ceremonially, the emphasis fell on the bishop's activity in the rite.

Two other major developments affected the church's view of ordination. The first was the development of apostolic succession. The second to have a major impact on ordination was the use of the language of priesthood. By the middle of the third century, Cyprian had developed the idea of the ministry as a priesthood to the point where the Lord's Supper was viewed as a sacrifice offered by the officiating "priest" to the Lord. This seriously changed the church's conception of ordination. The theology of the priesthood was based primarily on Old Testament examples. Drawing Old Testament conceptions of the priesthood naturally took with it Old Testament themes of succession.

Interestingly enough, the church's development of Apostolic Succession may have some roots in the similar ordination practices performed in Rabbinic Judaism. In a Rabbinic ordination ceremony, hands were laid upon the person. This conveyed both a passing of authority and a handing down of the wisdom of Moses. As discussed earlier, the laying on of hands carries the meaning of blessing, succession, and appointing a representative. Within Rabbinic Judaism, the laying on of hands played an important part in their ordination ritual. Its primary meaning in the rite was communicating succession. The authority and wisdom of Moses was imparted to them as a result of the laying on of hands. As the early church progressed, this ceremony within its ordination ritual began to carry a very similar meaning. The ordination of bishops began to include the passing down of apostolic knowledge and authority to the per-

son. "Irenaeus, writing in approximately 175 a.d. speaks of a "charisma" of truth given to the bishops as the successors of the apostles." Belief in the apostolic succession made the ruling Bishop the literal successor to the apostles. This meant that the ordination of these officers now included some imparting of special knowledge and authority; something quite absent from the New Testament church.

The Medieval era did not drastically alter the church's understanding of ordination because by the end of the fifth century, the church government structure was firmly in place. As well, the idea of apostolic succession was firmly entrenched. However, the medieval era did witness the growth of a major distinction between clergy and laity. As the medieval era progressed, the clergy was endowed with special clerical and priestly powers. They possessed numerous privileges and immunities, and wore special clerical garb as a sign of their status. The clergy were also made distinct from the laity by their practice of celibacy and by the sacramental nature of their office. During the medieval era, anointing even found its way into the church's ordination ritual. Bishops were anointed on the head and priests on the hands. The strong separation of ordained office-bearers and church laity was a major trademark of the medieval era. Ordination became a mystical activity that bestowed special gifts, status, and authority upon its recipient.

In evaluation of the changes in the church from the New Testament era through to the Medieval, it should be noted that not all the changes made were illegitimate. The motivation for a strong authority to lead and protect the church led to a strong view of ordination. However, the glorification of ordination to the point where it contributed to the huge distinction between clergy and laity was a serious error on the part of the church. This error turned laity into second-class citizens. As well, ordination became more associated with status than with service. This ran quite contrary to the character of ordination in the New Testament as ser-

vant leadership. Another serious error in the church's understanding of ordination was its belief in the sacramental power of the person. The ordained person functioned like an Old Testament priest, performing rituals and acting as intermediary between the church community and God. This restricted the believer's access to Christ. Lastly, the church's development of apostolic succession was also problematic because it ultimately resulted in the replacement of biblical authority with ecclesiastical tradition.

The reformers took issue with a number of these misunderstandings of ordination. The Reformation thinkers rejected both the hierarchical structure of the medieval church, and sacrificial character of the role of the priest. Instead, they argued strongly for the priesthood of all believers and for the proper administration of word and sacrament. The change in their view of ordination was from priest to preacher. Despite this significant change, the reformers' understanding of ordination remains somewhat ambiguous. "The term is used [by the reformers] in both a limited sense (as referred to the ceremonial act of the laying on of hands) and in a broader sense (as referring to the church's appointment and authorization of a minister to preach and to administer the sacraments.)"

The reformers' understanding of ordination did prompt significant changes. As a result of their conception of ordination, there was a decline in the sacramental understanding of the rite. As well, the belief in apostolic succession as a source of clerical authority was no longer accepted among Protestants. Instead, the authority of the clergy rested on a special call over and above the general call of all believers to ministry. They still retained a high view of church office and authority, but discounted any sort of mystical ritual whereby this authority was granted. As a result of this, the laying on of hands lost a significant amount of the authority it had come to engender in the medieval church. The Reformation thinkers caused ordination to lose much of its mystical character and regained some of the represen-

tative character that it first held in the New Testament church.

In the Christian Reformed Church today, ordination is usually viewed in conjunction with its understanding of church office. The development of church offices by the church is part of its history. As we have already seen with the role of the ruling bishop as protector and definer of the church and her doctrine, the church developed the role of office-bearers for a distinct reason. The Church's understanding of both ordination and of office have developed hand in hand. Currently, therefore, it is difficult to understand ordination in distinction from some sort of office. All things considered, church office has played a positive role in the church historically. However, it has also had a negative influence. An overly strong view of office in the Church has sometimes detracted from the office of all believers, and distorted the church's view of ordination.

The Christian Reformed Church has articulated an understanding of ordination. It says, "Ordination should be understood as the appointment or setting apart of certain members of the Church for special ministries that are strategic for the accomplishment of the church's total ministry." This statement is reflective of what ordination meant in the early church. It emphasizes the appointment and setting apart of certain members. These members become representatives of the church, selected to perform a certain task in relation to the church's total ministry.

The Church's understanding of ordination has had a long history of development. It has been strongly influenced by Old Testament "ordaining" ceremonies such as Anointing and the Laying on of hands. The New Testament practices of ordaining also introduced new and unique elements into the ordination process. In addition to these key sources of our understanding of ordination, the historical development of church office was crucial in the development of the church's understanding of ordination. The church's governing structures, as they developed throughout history significantly

shaped how an ordained person functioned in ministry and his status in the church. Throughout Church history, the strength of the church's conception of church office has corresponded directly with the extent of authority and power exercised by the ordained minister.

There are several prevalent themes that have emerged in this report as characteristics of a biblical view of ordination. The New Testament verbs used give us the sense of ordination as an appointment to a specific position. They also convey the sense of a person being chosen. These verbs shape a New Testament portrayal of ordination as the appointment or choosing of a person to do a certain task within the church. The New Testament account gives us a very practical side of ordination that seems to commend the development of special church office. The person being chosen by the community and by leaders in the church is appointed to fulfill a certain task.

A second major theme in ordination is shown to us by the use of the Laying on of hands. This ceremony gives the person being chosen a representative status within the church. The person is thus empowered to act on behalf of the church, and is mandated to carry out the church's ministry. This ministry is characterized by servant-leadership as commanded by Christ. It is important for us to keep this concept firm as well in our understanding of ordination. An emphasis on servanthood was a strong characteristic of church leadership in the New Testament and so deserves our attention today.

The Old Testament ceremony of anointing also teaches us about ordination. It communicates a sense of being set apart for special and exclusive service to God and his work. This is important in our understanding of the ordained ministry. We need to retain the view of a minister as being set apart for special service to God and his church. In the Christian Reformed Church, this special service to God and his church is characterized by the proper administration of Word and Sacrament.

The history of the church has also taught us significantly about ordination. The close connection of ordination and church office has challenged us to create a system of Church government that honors the ordination of special office bearers, but acknowledges the office of all believers and preserves their status as priests of God's kingdom. The history of the church has also forced us to inquire where the authority of an ordained person comes from. Reformation thinkers asserted that this authority comes from Christ; from a special call to ministry that sits over and above the general call to ministry of all believers.

The history of the church has also taught us the dangers of a false understanding of ordination. A false view of ordination and office overly glorified ordination and caused the church to regard the laity as second-rate citizens in God's kingdom. It also enabled ordained ministers to assume the mantle of Old Testament priest, and act as the intermediary between Christ and his people. The prominence of the apostolic succession also caused problems. It gave church tradition just as much governing authority as Holy Scripture. This gave the church a lot of power that it sometimes abused, resulting in the wounding of Christ's church.

A healthy understanding of ordination is important in the church. As we seek to pursue this goal we should be guided by examples and concepts from Holy Scripture and should examine the history of our church and the development of its traditions. In conclusion, this report defines ordination, in light of biblical and historical sources, as an appointing or setting aside of someone as a representative of the church to fulfill special tasks of ministry in response to a special call from Christ and his church to serve the body of Christ, and to further His kingdom.

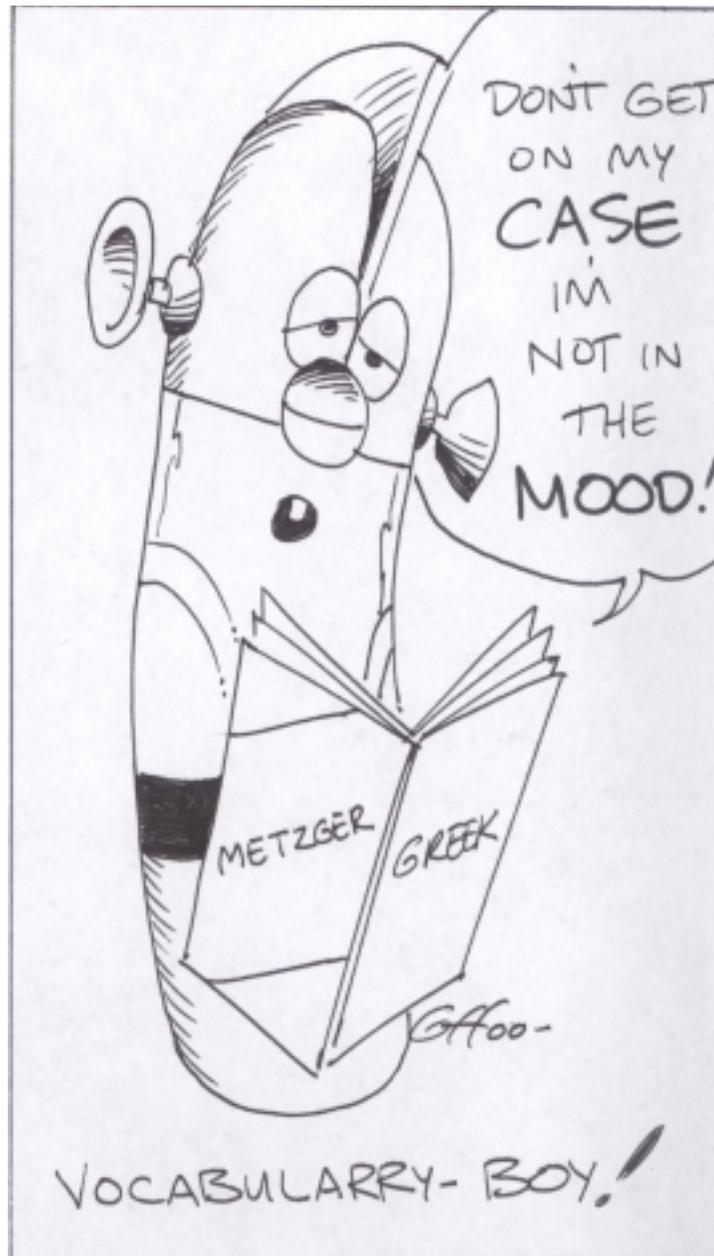
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This paper was written for Church Polity class, and seeks to discern the basic meaning of ordination as it has been understood historically and biblically in the Christian Church.





To a Cheesecake

How tempting she is! Such silky smooth skin
Perched on the table with her raspberry
Eyes fluttering at me. She's like Eve to
Adam, like she to Samson. Like
Dave's Bathsheba too.

I'm a fool like Adam; Samson and I
are weak; Dave and I aren't wise, Its she that
breaks me, she tears me down to A whimper-
ing belly. A stomach with out
A will, heart, nor mind.

A Cheesecake! My! My! Mars Bars I need not;
Nor do I wish for those two colored M's
Devil's food cake scares me, angel food's too pure
And the sundaes can never be
around on their names.

Raspberry swirled or shaved chocolate tossed through.
You temptress you! Grabbing my eyes until
my taste buds begin to drool. You whisper
my name so softly, I alone
hear your soft sweet voice!

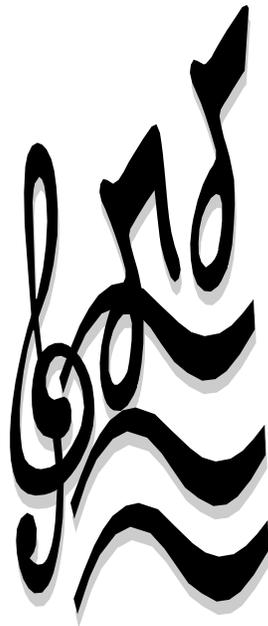
With those coy fluttering Raspberry eyes!
Well...Dave did go out and see Bathsheba.
Samson did love his Delilah so fair.
And Adam took from Eve that fruit
Forbidden by God!!

Such silky smooth skin tempts me from her plate!
Oh, you sweet cheesecake, My sin is eaten.

—JB!

Some Singing Stones

Walking down a wooded path,
surrounded by trees on either side,
a sound appeared in my ears
(a sweet sort of sound not found
along a wooded path).



I heard songs being sung
along that path as I
walked somewhere in the woods.
Children singing was what it was,
Yet, no children were anywhere to
be found.

Along that path, there sat on the
ground
little rocks strewn about.
They had their mouths wide open,
Their little hands raised high and
their eyes closed tight.

“Hosanna!” I heard, “Hosanna in the
highest!”
“Lord of Lords” was sung
in voices of those children.
In sweet voices that can never be
copied
I heard those Rocks singing.

“Blessed be the name of the Lord!”
They sung! They sung! Oh How
they Sung!
Their little rocky hands raised high
in the sky,
mouths agape and their tiny
nonexistent eyes shut with heart.
I sat down, and listened.

From the Editor

I have been honored with the position of being editor of The Stromata. This being my first year and my first attempt at doing such a job, I tried my best to whole heartily do the best I could.

As you go about reading the contents of this Student Theological Journal, I hope that it brings enlightenment to your heart and soul, as well as your mind. Those who contributed worked hard on their pieces, doing what they could to try and better understand their world around them, while in the process, allow us to better understand ourselves and our faith.

I hope that this first issue of the year has been beneficial to you as much as it has been to me.

In Christ...

Josh!

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