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One can affirm distinctions between church and world without affirming a disjunction between church and world.

LEONARD SWEET

Too many modern minds want to banish mystery, following the lead of modern science. But more and more scientists have realized that while they can develop models and labels for more and more phenomena, the depths of meaning and mystery in the cosmos will always exceed their grasp. When you feel that you have penetrated to an insight, go deeper, higher, farther—until you realize you are peering into a depth you cannot fathom. Don't be disappointed, but rather rejoice and revere not only the wonderful clarity revealed in Scripture, but also the amazing profundity hidden in Scripture.

BRIAN MCLAREN

Emerging church is not a quick "pick-me-up" for a sick body. It is a collection of new vessels for all the ingredients that are essential to church—an "up" dimension in worship, an "in" dimension in community, an "out" dimension in mission and an "of" dimension, as individual churches see themselves as part of the whole body of Christ.

MICHAEL MOYNAGH

## The "Hall of Shame" and the Tears of God



David Bush

I was preparing to teach on 1 Timothy 1:5: the "goal of our command is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith." I prayed the Lord would grant me his thoughts and affections. And he did, but in an unexpected way.

In the course of preparing the lesson, I examined Paul's concern over certain heterodox teachers who were promoting myths, endless genealogies, and misapplications of the law. Paul concluded they are "speculations" which led to "vain discussion" rather than the purposes of God—namely, love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Accordingly, Paul charged Timothy with the responsibility of opposing such teachers, both by confronting them and by teaching the God-given goal of love. He believed so much was at stake that the fallout—for some—had been the "shipwreck" of their faith.

As I reflected on contemporary examples of biblically-related speculations, I thought of seminary education. Being a seminary graduate myself, I pondered the never-ending speculations about supralapsarianism versus infralapsarianism, the Wellhausen theory, manuscript inconsistencies, source/textual/form criticism. The list goes on and on. What I could *not* reflect on, however, is the love such speculations stirred up

within me. The reason I could not was because speculations, as Paul implies, do not lead to our goal of loving God and neighbor. Learning to "give a defense for the hope within us" is one thing. But allowing a speculative, modernistic tail to wag the theological dog is dangerous.

Sunday morning soon came round, and there I stood before my class of adult "seekers," leading the group through the text. When it came time to mention my illustration of "speculations" and "vain discussion" regarding seminary education, I shared the following personal story.

When my wife and I were trying to decide where I would attend seminary, we visited a certain campus. I won't mention the name, but I will say that it is theologically conservative, and that it had made my short list of final two. We had scheduled a guided tour of the campus, so we made our way to the building where we were to meet our guide. Since he was not quite ready for us, my wife and I wandered down the large hallway. On the walls were pictures of past graduating classes. I gazed at them with a childlike interest, hoping to see some now-famous theologians in their younger seminary days. Our guide finally came out to greet us.

As I scanned the pictures, he walked over and stood next to me, looking up. In a disturbingly cavalier way, he said, "We call this the 'Hall of Shame.'"

"What did you just say?" I asked in astonishment.

"Yeah, we call this the 'Hall of Shame' because some of the students in the pictures have abandoned the faith. It is a reminder to us that *we* need to persevere in our faith."

As would probably many Calvinists, my thoughts immediately drifted to the nature of those students' faith. Must not have been true Christians, I mused. But even so, I thought, how odd that they would end up at seminary, of all places. My reaction was just one, long, theological "Hmmm." That was 1999; and to my own shame, it was six years before I finally felt the way I now believe God feels about them.

So there I stood, sharing my story about the "hall of shame." Unexpectedly, those three simple words that had been so easy to type while I was preparing my notes now

suddenly shook me—I could barely get them out of my mouth. The tears began to well up, and then streamed uncontrollably down my face (as they do even now). Seminary students abandoning the faith! Those who went to a place where they thought they would be built up in order that they, in turn, might build up others . . . only to make shipwreck of their own faith.

Apparently, the main dish of biblical and theological speculation was no less than a plate of poison for the unsuspecting. And for six long years my speculative systematic theology had cut off all affection and sadness over them.

I regrouped and made it through the rest of the lesson.

After Sunday school, my wife and I went to corporate worship. As we began to sing, my mind again was flooded with thoughts of those individuals who once had been excited about attending seminary, only to later abandon their faith and end up in the photographs that give the hallway its name—the "Hall of Shame."

My composure left me. Tears streamed down my face for what seemed an eternity. The music seemed to echo around me as if I had somehow been transported elsewhere. I stared straight ahead, unable to move and overwhelmed by sadness. And then I remembered. . . .

That morning, while in prayerful reflection on my lesson, I asked the Lord, "Lead me into *your* thoughts and affections." I am left with but one conclusion: God did what I had asked. He led me into what I now believe is a profound sadness on God's part when someone leaves the one "by whom they were purchased."

On the one hand, I am by theological definition a Calvinist. I believe that the saints do persevere. But on the other hand, I believe I have experienced some of how God feels about those who "fall away." A paradox? A contradiction? In other words, if God knows those who truly are his, and he enables them to persevere, why should it bother him at all when a "wolf in sheep's clothing" turns away? But that kind of speculation only *perpetuates* what I—together with Paul—am arguing against. While we are thinking about apostates in the theologically

anesthetizing, speculative manner in which we so often do, God must at the same time be weeping. Experientially, I can attribute my profound sadness and tears to only one source—the God who weeps over the lost.

As you can see, my soul is restless; it is telling me I *must* write about this. Thus, my encouragement to us all is simple, though not necessarily easy to swallow (especially for the "theologically-minded"). And it is this: *we must minimize biblical and personal speculations in favor of the essentials of our faith.* We have a goal, which "speculations" leading to "vain discussion" can never achieve: namely, love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

If that sounds prissy or overly sentimental, then maybe you have been impaled on the horns of a sacred theological cow. On the contrary, love is not only theologically rich but also incarnational in the most profound way. Yes, let us study to show ourselves approved and to defend the hope that is within us—yet always with the awareness that our goal is love.

In short, if I ever hear of someone abandoning the faith because they were *loved too much* by Christians, that will be the day I too will abandon it. In that case, you might as well follow me, because there is no other goal. Glory to God! Glory to Jesus Christ forever!

#### *Author*

David Bush is a graduate of Indiana University with a BA in journalism. He also holds the MDiv from Covenant Theological Seminary and an MS in Educational Psychology from the University of Tennessee. He and his wife, Michelle, reside in Knoxville, Tennessee, where David is active in teaching and small group ministries at Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church. David also volunteers as a literacy skills tutor with the Knox County Sheriff's Detention Center, as well as Friends of Literacy, Inc. He is currently pursuing a vocation in full-time adult discipleship ministry or in the field of adult education. David and Michelle hope to adopt their first child in the near future.