

Divine Call; Divine Accountability
Robert Newton, October 13 & 14, 2008

- 1) Office of the Public Ministry, a Divine/Human arrangement
 - a) God's idea
 - i) Acts 20, Take heed (**prose,cete**) to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son.
 - ii) Ephesians 4, And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;
 - iii) Great Commission passages???
 - (1) Matthew 28, Going therefore . . .
 - (2) John 20, As the Father has sent me . . .
 - (3) Luke 24, Acts 1, You shall be my witnesses . . .
 - b) Human agency (Doctrine of vocation/office)
 - i) 1 Timothy 3, The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife . . .
 - ii) Acts 14, And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.
 - iii) Titus 1, This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you, if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate. For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless . . .
 - iv) AC XIV (German) Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call.
- 2) Accountability and the Office of the Public Ministry
 - a) God's Idea
 - i) Law or Gospel? . In one sense accountability is neither Law nor Gospel, as we often employ those terms, in that it neither condemns, nor saves, nor motivates.
 - (1) It's definitely not Gospel but it's all about the ministry of the Gospel
 - (2) Nor is it Law in the second or third use of it.

- (3) But accountability should be called “law” in like fashion to Newton’s “Law of Gravity” or simply, how God wired the universe
 - (a) Setting boundaries for sea and land, night and day, etc
 - (b) We reap what we sow
 - (c) You judge a tree by its fruits
 - (d) Accountability sits in the category of “Common (First Article) Sense”

- ii) Accountability, or if you will, accounting, is simply a God given essential of faithful stewardship. Accounting, including giving an account, is basic to Jesus teaching regarding His Kingdom and the stewardship of His Gospel.
 - (1) Luke 16, the story of the shrewd steward
 - (2) Matthew 24, the wise servant
 - (3) Luke 19, the story of the minas.

- iii) St. Paul made accountability an essential of the “all things” he taught to the churches.
 - (1) 1 Corinthians 3, “Be careful how you build. Each man’s work will become evident.”
 - (2) Romans 14, “So each of us shall give an account of himself to God.”

- iv) We account for what we value. So, what did Jesus value?
 - (1) Luke 19, our Lord said, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”
 - (2) Luke 15, our Lord asked, “What man among you if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them does not leave the ninety-nine in an open pasture and go after the one that was lost until he finds it?”
 - (3) Matthew 9, “When He saw the crowds, had compassion for them, because they were harassed and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Note the definition of a sheep who is lost: simply, a sheep lost from its shepherd.)
 - (4) John 10, “And I have other sheep which are not of this fold. I must bring them also. And they shall hear my voice and they shall be one flock with one shepherd.”
 - (5) John 12, “Verily, verily I say to you unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains by itself. But if it dies, it bears much grain. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself.”
 - (6) John 15, “You did not choose me but I chose you that you should bear much fruit and that your fruit might remain.”

- v) It’s obvious from these several Scripture passages our Lord places high, even highest value, on seeking and saving the lost. He accounted for its accomplishment.

b) Human Agency

- i) Desiring to be faithful in our administration of the Gospel, we have developed a significant system or structure of accountability. We call it “Synod.”
 - (1) Districts and their presidents
 - (a) I am charged with accounting for the doctrine and practice of 180 plus congregations and several hundred ordained and commissioned servants

- (b) I forfeit my office as a district president if I choose not to be responsible in accounting for the pure doctrine and practice of the pastors and congregations in my district.
 - (2) Circuits and their counselors: Each circuit counselor is charged with overseeing the doctrine and practice of the congregations in his circuit.
 - ii) We hold each other accountable to be faithful in three essentials of Gospel ministry
 - (1) Doctrine
 - (2) Morality
 - (3) Administration of the Gospel
 - iii) As pastors we pledge our faithfulness in these essentials
 - (1) We make several promises or vows at our ordinations
 - (2) We repeat them at each installation
 - (3) We acknowledge and agree that we will exhort and encourage one another to keep these promises
 - (4) We also accept the necessity of admonishing, reproofing, and even disciplining brothers who do not keep these promises.
 - iv) We intentionally hold one another accountable for our stewardship of the Gospel to the already baptized. However, we have unintentionally agreed not to hold each other accountable for the stewardship of the Gospel to the not yet baptized. Therein lies the rub.
 - (1) You will not find the “lost” intentionally identified in our ordination vows.
 - (2) They simply are not on the radar screen, therefore, they are not an essential component of our accountability structure.
- 3) We need to realign our accountability priorities with those of our Lord. Again, *we account for what He values.*
- a) The passages that we often use to establish the Office of the Public Ministry are directed toward seeking the lost: Matthew 28, John 20
 - b) Likewise, St. Paul argues for the necessity of the Gospel Office in Romans 10, *For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”*
 - c) Our Lord holds His people accountable for their stewardship of the Gospel to the nations.
 - i) Luke 4 (Note that God’s people rejected Jesus as their Messiah because they rejected His messianic mission to the nations.)

- ii) Matthew 21 (I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people producing its fruits.)
- 4) True accountability for the Gospel ministry requires an accounting for our ministry to those who have not yet heard and, therefore, do not yet believe.
- a) Biblical accountability leads to repentance (changing one's mind about something).
 - i) Without accounting there is no basis for reflection on needed change.
 - ii) Accounting of my sins, that is the x-ray or the mirror of the Law, leads me to reflection and repentance to the Gospel of salvation.
 - iii) Accounting of a low or non-existent harvest leads me to ask if or how I am planting.
 - (1) If I am not planting then I need to repent, that is, change my mind and start planting.
 - (2) If I am planting and there is no harvest I might examine how or what I planted and repent or change my mind about how I was going about this work of planting.
 - b) Biblical accountability does not allow us to promote ourselves. We are unworthy servants, doing only what was required (our duty) Luke 17. We hold this stewardship of the Gospel by grace alone, without the deeds of the law (Romans 3, 4).
 - c) Biblical accountability accounts for the right things
 - i) We cannot account for how many come to faith in Jesus Christ. That belongs only to the Holy Spirit who works faith where and when it pleases Him through the preaching of the Gospel.
 - ii) However, we can account for where, when, and to whom we preach the Gospel.
 - iii) In farming terms, we cannot account for how many bushels of wheat we will produce in the harvest. The yield is ultimately an act of God. However, we can account for how many acres we plant in wheat.
 - (1) There is a correlation between how many acres a farmer plants with wheat and how much wheat he harvests at the other end.
 - (2) A farmer who complains that his wheat crop is very poor or non-existent might be asked a simple even stupid question. Did you plant any seed?
 - (3) So also a congregation that has not harvested any souls unto salvation might ask itself a similar question: Did we sow any Gospel among the lost?
 - d) Biblical accountability is systemic (includes the whole body)
 - i) The fact that the lost are not on our radar screen (very lost) must be shared by the entire church and not just or simply pastors
 - (1) What are the Biblical roles of the baptized in the mission of God?

- (2) What are the Biblical roles of the “overseers” (pastors) in the mission of God?
 - (3) How do these Biblical realities shape the priorities of how we train for the pastoral office?
- ii) Synod needs to lead
- (1) Synod was formed for three primary purposes
 - (a) Uniting congregation around an orthodox Confession
 - (b) Formation of pastors (seminaries)
 - (c) Uniting congregations to speak the Gospel to those outside the church
 - (2) Synod faithfully trained pastors to lead congregations faithfully in what can be termed a “churched” culture (the Christian church played a major role in the social systems of communities)
 - (3) Synod now must prepare pastors for leading congregations in a “post-church” culture.
 - (a) This post-churched culture is very different from the churched culture in which most of our LCMS members grew up and for which most of our pastors were prepared.
 - (b) The post-church culture most resembles “pre-church” cultures, better known in our circles as “foreign mission fields.”
 - (4) Preparing our present pastors for the exotic post-church world in which their congregations exist must become an accountable priority for our synod (continuing education). Revitalization is the essential starting place.
 - (5) Preparing our future pastors (seminaries) for the exotic post-church culture into which they will be called must become an accountable priority for our synod.
- iii) The accountability system of our synod in the era of the “churched culture” held pastors only accountable for Gospel ministry to the baptized.
- (1) It assumed that all ministry belonged essentially to the called pastor and not to the whole church
 - (2) We, therefore, held pastors (and only pastors) personally accountable for
 - (a) True doctrine taught in their congregation
 - (b) Personal life that matched the true Word
 - (c) Administration of the Gospel as outlined in their ordination vows.
 - (i) The circle of that activity included those who found their way to worship on Sunday morning or to some other ministry of the congregation
 - (ii) That ministry was “do-able” by the pastor
 - (3) No one else was accountable
- iv) The present post-church era of missions requires a ministry configuration which calls for the re-emergence of the Royal Priesthood—the Missionary People of God
- (1) How does that shift in ministry impact the pastor only model?
 - (2) How do we legitimately hold pastors accountable for outreach when that ministry ultimately requires a joint effort between pastor and people?

Summary: The Lord of the Harvest holds His church and its ministers accountable for our administration of the Gospel among those who have heard His voice and those who have not yet heard. Desiring to remain faithful to Him, we are bound to do the same.

Discussion questions: Do we have the same standards of accountability governing our ministry of the Gospel to the lost as we have governing our ministry of the Gospel to the already found?

If so what are those standards?

If we don't, then what standards of Biblical accountability would be appropriate?

How would we work together (Synod) in helping each other (pastors) and congregations to proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet heard and account to our Lord and each other that we are doing it?