

Articles and Sermons :: This Man's Primary Question by Steve Gallagher

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One of the great disappointments I experienced over the years was the snubbing I received from a minister I had held in very high regard as a young minister. I admired this man because he was a true pioneer in his field and fearlessly stood for truth against a great deal of opposition. Eventually I began to run into him occasionally at ministerial functions and was puzzled and hurt over his obvious aloofness with me.

I found out that, as a Calvinist, he had a problem with the fact that I came from a Pentecostal background. Apparently, the primary question in his mind regarding me was, "Is he one of us?" Had he bothered to ask me what I believed, I could have explained to him that over the years I had actually come to embrace many of the teachings of the Reformed movement. I could have told him that for years I had been a voice within Pentecostal circles denouncing the frivolity, carnality and worldliness that has taken over this movement in the past thirty years or so. But it was obvious that he was satisfied with the opinions he had formed about me.

Someone once used a triangle to illustrate a godly marriage. As each mate grows in their respective relationship with God (vertically), they also draw closer to each other (horizontally). I believe this same figure holds true for believers from differing doctrinal backgrounds: as they mature in the faith, they tend to move toward the center and away from the extreme positions they once staunchly held as immature believers. Godly people typically learn to place a higher value on Christ-like traits such as humility, love and unity than on doctrinal opinions of secondary importance.

How refreshing it was when I was recently invited to be the keynote speaker at a revival conference held in Holland. Heart Cry Netherlands, the organization that sponsors this bi-annual event, is headed by a young evangelist named Arjan Baan (pronounced Are-ee-on Bon). Like most Dutch believers, he is from a Reformed background, and yet, to his credit, his first question when considering me as a speaker was not, "Is he one of us?" but more along the lines of: "Does he hold to the foundational tenets of the faith? Is he a man of God? Will he bring a relevant word from the Lord to my people? Does he actually live what he preaches?"

I believe one reason Arjan (see picture) was able to look beyond my denominational background is that he had long since crossed party lines in his own personal Bible studies. Over the years he read such non-Calvinist authors as A.W. Tozer, Roy Hession and Watchman Nee. I doubt that he agreed with everything he ran across in their books, but they clearly gave him a much broader perspective in his own Christian worldview.

And, come to think of it, I guess I can say the same thing about myself. For many years I have greatly appreciated the writings of such Reformed ministers as J.C. Ryle, Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones and A.W. Pink. The thing that stands out to me about these men was not their Calvinistic beliefs, but the fact that each of them clearly walked with God. I gladly would sit at the feet of such men.

The apostle Paul told the believers of his day to be "of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves... Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus..." (Philippians 2:2-5)

This is a good word for us today as well. Wouldn't it be a marvelous thing if Christians actually began to live with the mind of Christ toward each other and laid aside their petty differences? I'm certain that it would be very pleasing to the Lord to see His children love each other in this way. When we are tempted to write someone off because he belongs to a different denomination than ourselves, perhaps it would be wiser to make certain we are asking the right questions about the person.

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