

## **Home Missions Committee Conference**

### **Church Planting and Biblical Counseling**

#### **Report by Randall Klynsma**

The Synod Home Missions Committee invited Dr. George Scipione to speak at this year's Committee Meeting Conference. Dr. Scipione has been serving the churches of the Orthodox Presbyterian Seminary since he was ordained in 1974. He has served as a church planter for two works and has been instructing at seminaries the last 35 years. He has been a leader Nouthetic Counseling movement (with Jay Adams). He is a fellow, board member and past president of ACBC (Association of Certified Biblical Counselors).

Dr. Scipione gave four lectures to the Home Mission Pastors, Committee members, and a number of guests. The first was entitled: "The Challenge of Biblical Counseling." In this first lecture he laid out his understanding of Biblical counseling as basically the labor of Christian Discipleship. He likened it to the task of evangelism, applying the truths of God's Word to the hearts and lives of believers. Pastors, as shepherds of the flock, are fully capable of giving counsel and instruction to God's people in their trials and afflictions.

He says the principal issue when it comes to the work and role of the pastor in Biblical Counseling is the Sufficiency of the Bible. Do we believe the Bible and the direction and guidance it provides or not? He says the challenge of facing pastor and Christian cultures are the same as those facing believers and the church: The World, the Flesh and the Devil. The World is basically the influence of the world on the hearts and minds of everyone. The basic mindset of the world and far too many Christians is humanism. The influence of the world is contrary to God. When we think and act like the world acts, we should not be surprised that life is hard and does not work. Scripture is clear, do not love the world or the things of the world (1 John 2:15-17).

As if the influence of the world is not enough, the remnants of sin in the hearts of Christians pose yet another barrier to godliness and contentment. Most believers would like a shortcut to spiritual growth and maturity. They would like holiness in a pill. The teaching of Scripture is that growth and maturity and holiness, come over time by diligent use of the means of grace. We all are to fight the good fight. We are to be Romans 6-7-8 Christians. Being a Christian and maintaining our confession takes time and effort, persistence and self-discipline.

The third challenge to Biblical Counseling is the church's great foe, the Evil One. Every time a new church is planted it is like a military unit establishing an outpost in enemy territory. There is a spiritual dynamic that we have to account for. If we think the enemy is weak or absent, we will live carelessly and be at risk. We are to hold fast to the Word, be fervent in faith, and prepare our flocks for the unrelenting attacks of the Evil One. Those who seem like friends might eventually show themselves to be enemies of the flock. This is partly why in the qualifications for office bearers the Apostle Paul says that those who are new to the faith (or congregation) should not be put in positions of authority.

The second lecture was, "The Pastor and Biblical Counseling." In this presentation he focused our attention on the Apostle Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. He showed that Paul's labors are an example for us and our work. He taught publically, that is to say, he spoke and preached to audiences of those who would hear. We could liken this to preaching and teaching in church setting. He also taught them in private, from house to house. He would go to the people where they were, in their homes. We might liken this to making pastoral calls or even the practice of house visitation.

And what did he teach them? We're told he would share with them the whole council of God, with all humility and tears, "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." All this to say that he would patiently apply and teach the truths of God's Word and His revealed will to each of God's people. This labor, which he maintained, was constant and consistent for more than two years.

As his message continues, he warns them that they must be vigilant in their care of Christ's flock. Why? Because after his departure ravenous wolves will arise, not sparing the flock, will seek to gain followers after themselves. These false elders and leaders come both from within and without. The real question will be whether we can genuinely believe the Word or not. As much as we believe we will take it seriously and do what it says.

The third lecture was "The Body and Biblical Counseling." He reminded us as church planters that we have the regular responsibilities of other pastors, and more. Speaking generally, what we need to establish a new congregation can be summarized as the four M's. We need: 1. A Meeting Place, 2. Members, 3. Money (fund the continued work) and 4. Men to Lead. He focused our attention on Ephesians 1-4. The motivation for our work begins with Paul's reminder of the completed work of Christ as the outworking of God's perfect plan of redemption. The result of this work is Christ's exaltation to the height of heaven. He is given a name above every name and authority over all. This is not just future hope but a present reality. We must never forget that the Church is Christ's and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

He administers His kingdom through the Word of His grace. Men are dead in their sin and trespasses, but God makes them alive. He gathers, defends, and protects His own from every nation, tribe, and people. This church that he gathers is His, and He cares for them through the officers whom he appoints (see Ephesians 4:11-12): Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Some of these were temporary others were permanent and continue to the present day. He emphasized that their work and ministry was directed toward the entire church so that each part (of the body) would each do their share: "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry." God's people share in the office of every believer and thus share in the three-fold office of Christ.

The challenge to every church planter (and regular pastor) is to utilize the gifts that God has given, both the young and the old, the men and the women, everyone doing their part. In other words, the challenge of Biblical Counseling and the Body of Christ, is to encourage their growth and maturity. We accomplish this by preaching, teaching, and applying the Word of God to the hearts and minds of God's people. I found it interesting that Dr. Scipioni said he refuses to counsel those who do not profess to

believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those that profess to believe can be held accountable and directly addressed by the Scriptures: teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.

The fourth and final lecture was "Preaching and Biblical Counseling." He summarized the basic challenge of preaching is to explain and apply particular passages in the context of the Book where they're found, in its broader context of the redemptive history, to the lives of God's people. When pastors faithfully teach the Word of God, God's people will be challenged to hear and heed the Word as it's taught. Through the ministry of the Word, they will hear Christ's voice, and because they know Him and His will, they will yield their wills to His and do what He says. As we prepare our sermons, we should anticipate what our people will hear and how our people will respond. As the Apostle Paul did in Romans 6, we might address any excuses they might make, and encourage to submit to the counsel of God's Word.

True preaching addresses the heart. He mentioned the comparison between preaching and counseling. He said COUNSELING is personalized pointed private preaching. While PREACHING is public counseling, discipleship, and evangelizing. Proper preaching should lead to repentance. In affect preaching should communicate the purpose and meaning intended the Holy Spirit to God's people. As you and the flock learn together to submit to the Lord's revealed will, you should communicate the truth in love. As you counsel and teach, you and the congregation's hearts will be bound together in mutual love and devotion to the Lord.

Our meeting concluded Wednesday morning with each of the missionaries sharing how things were going in their respective fields. These were followed by times of prayer by the committee members.

We enjoyed helpful encouragement, sweet fellowship, and delicious food. The ladies from Omaha provided supper on Monday evening and as our co-hosts, St. John's Reformed Church in Lincoln provided hospitality, cookies and bars for snacks, and the noon meal on Tuesday from Chick-Fil-A. After our sessions on Monday and Tuesday evenings we enjoyed fellowship by watching two newly released videos: CALVINIST, a documentary on the rise and resurgence of Calvinism in recent years, and LUTHER: the Life and Legacy of the German Reformer. The CALVINIST video was especially enjoyed and, if I may say so, highly recommended. By mid-afternoon on Wednesday most of the delegates were either on their way home or dropped off at airport for their return flights.