

Mechanics and Inspiration

Years ago, as editor of our denominational periodical, I was acutely aware of the tension being generated by widespread discussions among us on the issue of biblical inspiration. Behind it all were insinuations being made in a recently published book that our seminary--among others--was not being faithful to that view of Scripture held by many that the Bible, in its original form, was verbally inspired. It was not enough for the proponents of that view to confess, as the constitution of our church does, "the Holy Scripture, the Old and the New Testament, is the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct." One had, in further defense of the Bible, to say that it was verbally inspired. I knew instinctively that many on both sides embroiled in the tension were not sophisticated enough theologically to engage each other thoughtfully. For most it had become a personal issue, behind which lay years of suspicion fed by outside gurus and who knows what else, as well as weariness on the part of supporters over having to argue over the Bible's authority. Wasn't it enough to declare it "the Word of God"?

Wanting to address the issue, and wondering how without adding to the tension, I remember feeling really frustrated. That very evening, as if not having enough on my mind, our dryer at home was acting up. Knowing I was up against a deadline for my editorial I decided, on fixing the dryer (or so I thought) to write rather about that.

The more I got into it, the more I realized how parabolic all my struggles with that dryer were to the issue of biblical authority wrenching at my soul. Detailing all the mechanics I had been through over time seeking to deal with that appliance—dismantling the back cover over and over, trying to adjust the belt that drove the drum, experimenting also with adjusting the bearing wheels—I recall feeling quite proud of myself. Who needs a professional? "I'm a real, honest-to-goodness, and (best of all) free-for-nothing mechanic!" I wrote. "Got any bum dryers, anyone?"

Trouble was, after going up and down the back stairs more often than I care to admit, fully devoted to its fixing, the dryer still wasn't working—at least not more than once at a time. My wife, understandably, was getting impatient—with four children at that time and mounting loads of wet clothes needing to be dried. "She must sense that it means something to me to fix it," I wrote. "Otherwise she would have put her foot down for sure, because we've both known for a long time that the dryer is on its last legs."

But I was determined, and she was gracious about letting me work on it further. Meanwhile, down in the basement, inspiration for her was coming from using our tenant's drier to issue clean clothes, warm to the touch and ready to wear. It was kind of embarrassing. I had all the theories but the drum wasn't moving on our drier, and the flame wasn't burning and whenever I tried to turn it on again it just started to smoke. Although Alyce remained amazingly patient, she began to wonder if we were not presuming a bit on our tenants.

"There's a parable somewhere here," I wrote. "Confucius might have put it this way: 'Warm shirt over heart is better than many theories in head!' And one far greater than Confucius must have been referring to something like this when he said: 'You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.'"

It was a moving moment for me, one of both revelation and reason, not only to get beyond my theories and go for help, but also to serve what was really needed--both in my basement and the household of faith I loved. "We have things fixed and set that are not running,"

I confessed. “We have things decided that are not producing. There’s a time and place for mechanics, but there’s a time and place to set them aside as well.

“Warm clothes are what we need. And there’s no fire to warm the clothes when the drum isn’t turning. Maybe it’s time to call in the Serviceman, no matter what the cost. Maybe only he can set things right!

“I think, in my case, I learned my lesson,” Hopefully some others did as well.

“Mechanics may be necessary to inspiration, but mechanics without inspiration is dead.”

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The Covenant Companion
02/07/1967 (Revised)