

RICHARD C. CHEWNING: A TESTIMONY

A REQUEST

Dear Dick,

Would you consider writing out your testimony about how the Lord led you in your move toward Biblical integration? I think it would be most helpful for many members of the CBFA to read.

-Yvonne Smith

THE TESTIMONY OF RICHARD C. CHEWNING

The first twenty years of my life shaped my sense of aloneness, my feeling of being an outsider, and my denial skills. Seven of the next eight years were spent with Shirley where the “light” of acceptance first appeared. (We were married in 1955.)

At age eleven I accepted Christ as my Savior. But I tried to use Him. I did not faithfully follow Him. I needed help but did not understand what help I needed.

In the Fall of 1961 when I was 28 Christ mercifully became my **Lord**. I was in the doctoral program at the University of Washington in Seattle at the time.

My pastor said he had never known anyone before who had so warped an understanding of the nature of God. He told me to buy and study the **New American Standard Bible**, it being, at the time, the most faithful translation of the original Hebrew and Greek. I did. And he loaned me his copy of Stephen Charnock’s, **The Existence and Attributes of God**. It, along with the Scripture,

opened before me a whole new worldview.

Footnote 1 below lists the eight books that have impacted me the most.¹

Along the way and over time the Holy Spirit seared² my heart with specific Scriptures that I turn to again and again. Below are a few samples:

1) Matthew 7:7 – “**Ask**, and it shall be given to you” (Emphasis added) This was my first deep searing –ever since I have asked for what I believed was needed; God has faithfully answered.

2) John 5:39-40 – “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness to me; and **you are not willing to come to me**, that you might have *life*.” (Emphasis added) Ever since this “searing” I have sought a “personal relationship” with Christ. The Holy Spirit delivered me from the sin of *bibliolatry*.

3) Psalm 46:10 – “Cease striving [let go; relax] and **know** that I am God;” (Emphasis added) I was struggling with how I could “truly know God” and not merely “know about Him.”

4) John 14:16-17 – “...I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but **you know³ Him** because He abides with you, and will be in you.”(Emphasis added) Christ’s statement, “... but you know Him...”, started me on a blessed journey that continues. The Greek word used here

¹(1) **Bible** (NASB); (2) Stephen Charnock, **The Existence and Attributes of God**; (3) Edward H. Bickersteth, **The Trinity**; (4) Francis A. Schaeffer, **The God Who Is There**; (5) Max Weber, **The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism**; (6) R. H. Tawney, **Religion and the Rise of Capitalism**; (7) H. R. Rookmaaker, **Modern Art and the Death of a Culture**; (8) David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, **The Sermon on the Mount**.

²Seared – an affixing or “branding” God’s Word on a heart that transcends memorization.

³There are three Greek words that are translated into English as “know” or “knowledge.” They are:

1) **gnosis** – to “know” present and fragmentary knowledge;

2) **epignosis** – to “know” fully or truly; and

3) **ginosko** – to “know experientially.” The Greek word used in John 14:17 is **ginosko**.

is one that means we come to know “experientially.” An example of this kind of experiential knowing is spoken of in Psalm 46 – “God is...a very present help in trouble...” Or consider John 14:27 – “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you.”

5) Isaiah 46:3-4 – “Listen to Me...you who have been borne by Me from birth, and have been carried from the womb; even to your old age, I shall be the same, and even to your graying years I shall bear you!...I shall carry you; and I shall bear you, and **I shall deliver you.**” (Emphasis added). Being 76 - taking “oral chemo” every day since 1999; being very tired all the time; having a noticeably declining ability to remain mentally focused – I am assured that God will deliver me: what a promise.

One day in the mid 1960’s when engaged in my morning devotions the Holy Spirit made me aware that I was seeking God’s will in my church, family and social areas of life but not in my teaching. Why not? I ought to. How was it done? Was anyone else doing it? Who would show me the way?

“Dead end after dead end” greeted me as I sought to find someone who was filtering and associating the economic arena through the “lens of Scripture.” My search turned up nothing, but I really didn’t know where to look. I had never been exposed to Christian higher education. I had been educated at VA Tech, UVA, and the University of Washington. I had never even heard of a “worldview.”

So I prayed and asked the Lord to help me discover clues that would address my quest. For the next twenty years I spent a few hours every day reading the Bible, both Old and New Testament, with this question in the forefront of my mind: “Does this verse have any application to economics and business?” If it did I put the letter **E** in the margin. When I finished reading a Bible I put it on the shelf (full of **E**’s) and purchased a new one. By living in the Word the “application light” began to brighten.

During these years of praying, searching the Scripture, and tentatively making some verbal efforts at communicating “God’s perspective” on the subjects I taught, I was simultaneously

reading and rereading Charnock, Bickersteth, Weber, Tawney, Schaeffer, Rookmaaker, and Lloyd-Jones. (Their writings are noted in Footnote 1.) Their work demonstrated the importance, the application, and the impact of God’s Word on lives. I was greatly encouraged by their work but I personally avoided writing. I had never enjoyed it. I am a *dyslexic*.

In the academic year 1978-1979 the “American Assembly Collegiate Schools of Business” (AACSB) instituted a mandate that “Ethics” be incorporated into the curriculum of every accredited institution. The 42 faculty members in the School of Business at the University of Richmond, where I was teaching, formed a committee to explore how this mandate might be met. I was asked to submit a syllabus for what a course in “Business Ethics” might look like. I did, and was subsequently asked if I would stop teaching *finance* and move to the field of *ethics*.

This turn of events was an answer to prayer. For fourteen years I had been immersed in the study and thought process of applying God’s Word to economics and business, but the chance to apply ethics across the disciplines struck me as a freeing opportunity. So I was given a sabbatical in 1980 and went to the University of St. Andrews in Scotland as a post-doctoral student to attend their seminary, St. Mary’s College. There I learned a great deal about *human thought*. They emphasized *philosophy*, not God’s Word. The experience was enlightening but much of it clashed with the Word of God:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

The two verses just quoted became filters and shields through which I examined all thoughts, claims of truth, and writings that came my way

over the twenty years I actively taught “applied Christian ethics” – 1980 to 2000.

But how did I, who disliked writing so much, get involved in doing so much of it? In 1973 I was elected to the Covenant College Board of Trustees against my will – a whole other story. Joel Belz, the founder of *WORLD* magazine, who was at that time working for the *Presbyterian Journal*, was also a Board member. We became friends. He encouraged me to write. He then strongly encouraged me to write. He then, it seemed to me, almost insisted I write. Whatever the reality, in the late Fall of 1981, twenty-three years after I began teaching and fourteen years after I began searching Scripture for its biblical applications, I finally agreed to work on a one page piece relating God’s Word to a common economic issue facing all Christians. The readership response to the essay was so positive that I interpreted it as

Changing Culture, was published in 1983.⁵ This was my first book.

I gradually felt “compelled” to write. It was not pleasurable, but it gradually became an imperative. 1 Corinthians 9:16-17 (written below) was not seared into my heart but seemed to lie in the back of my mind and surface, as if through a haze, to bring comfort to me whenever I grew weary.

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. (Emphasis added.)

I could have substituted the word “write” into Paul’s testimony where he used the phrase,

God, the Potter, is capable of creating a dyslexic who has little natural ability to write coherently and put him on the anvil of life and forge him into a useful communicator of the application of His Word to the fields of business and economics.

God’s will that I continue.⁴ The “Christians in the Marketplace” essays became my first *application* writings.

Paralleling this experience with Joel Belz, in the fall of 1981 Robert Dame, a publisher, dropped into my office at the University of Richmond and asked me what I was doing with the new *ethics* requirement put in place by the AACSB. I told him what I was doing, showed him the class syllabus, and we struck up a conversation regarding my thoughts on what a holistic approach to ethics might look like. Before he left my office I was under contract. The book, *Business Ethics in a*

“preach the gospel.” Writing gradually became something I had to do. “Pleasure” and “personal satisfaction” were simply not part of my *motivation*.

In addition I also realized the difficulties I faced when placing biblical matters before an audience that came from diverse *hermeneutic* traditions. So I made a commitment to only write things that could be backed up with *three biblical references*. These I call *biblical principles*.

In God’s providence I was invited to Baylor University in 1985 to occupy the “Harry and Hazel Chavanne Chair of Christian Ethics in

⁴ This was just two years after I had agreed to shift my academic focus from *finance* to *ethics*.

⁵ Richard C. Chewning, *Business Ethics in a Changing Culture* (Richmond, VA, Robert F. Dame, Inc., 1983)

⁶ Richard C. Chewning, “Can Free Enterprise Survive Ethical Schizophrenia?” *Business Horizons*, Volume 27, Number 2 (March/April, 1984): pp. 5-11.

Business.” An article I had written in *Business Horizons* in 1984,⁶ and a former University of Richmond student who was employed at Baylor, were God’s “tools for the invitation.”

I had not yet, however, clarified in my mind an answer to an important question, “Should my writing be directed toward a Christian audience (like my first essays) or directed toward the broader market (like my first book)?” The Lord providentially answered my question in early 1986. I had an article rejected by a premier ethics journal because a reviewer discerned that the underlying presuppositions were “religious.” He wrote, “I will never accept a manuscript that is rooted in religion.” The words “Judaic/Christian” were the only *overt* reference in the article to anything religious. Enough was enough. But the rejection gave me an answer to my question. I would work thereafter to serve my brothers and sisters in Christ. My commitment to the Christian Business Faculty Association (CBFA) was confirmed.

It was my honor to be elected to the CBFA Board in 1991. Under Alec Hill’s Presidency (1992-1993) the Board invited the CBFA membership to approve the *idea* of establishing a *journal* and giving the Board permission to interview persons interested in being its Editor. Those interviewed were to bring their vision for the journal to the interview. In the Fall of 1993 Dr. Sharon G. Johnson was elected Editor and *The Journal of Biblical Integration in Business (JBIB)* was born. I had dreamed of a journal and the dream became true. I rejoiced. (I did not involve myself in Sharon’s selection. I was President of the Board that year, and Sharon was (and is) a very good friend.)

While at Baylor (1985-2000), five more books, a “Study Bible,” and numerous articles were published. I retired on July 1, 2000, at age 67. Baylor graciously made me an “Emeritus Professor of Christian Ethics.”

In 2001 John Brown University (JBU) invited me to come there as a “Distinguished Scholar in Residence.” (No remuneration was involved.) I completed a 300,000 word manuscript while at JBU entitled, *Becoming Partakers of Christ’s Divine Nature*. This is a comprehensive work that explores in depth the “genesis” and “roots”

of ethics. I am praying for a publisher. Shirley is praying that a publisher will not have to be found *posthumously*.

Two final recollections are in order though. The establishment of the “*Richard C. Chewning Award*” at the 1998 CBFA Annual Conference absolutely stunned me. I unashamedly wept before those assembled. We all knew an award was going to be named that night but surely it would be named for William C. Pollard, or someone of his stature. He is my standard and model of a Christian executive. And he was behind the funding of the award. That the award was named for me was a shock.

And almost as shocking was my being awarded the “Sharon G. Johnson Award” in 2007 in Seattle “for a lifetime of *scholarship*.” I insisted that Shirley accompany me to the podium for the receipt of the award. Those who were present may remember her coming forward, really against her will. But I was overcome with a sense of *denial*. I thought, “I shouldn’t be given the award.” I spent 49 years of my professional life *denying* that I was either a competent *writer* or a true *scholar*. (The opening sentence of this testimony mentions this reality.) I wanted to hide.

But God is kind. Four months later on a February morning in 2008 I awoke to an *epiphany*. I did not hear a voice nor did I see a vision, but into my mind came a startling comprehension:

God, the Potter, is capable of creating a dyslexic who has little natural ability to write coherently and put him on the anvil of life and forge him into a useful communicator of the application of His Word to the fields of business and economics.

“Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” – Exodus 4:11.

God has finally brought me to the place where I can accept that I am an author with average skills who perhaps worked a bit harder than most to create something useful for His people.

To God be the glory!

