

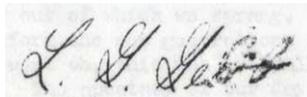
BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
L. G. GEBB, PASTOR  
LAKELAND, FLORIDA

Dear Brother Pastors and Session Members:

It was my privilege to enjoy a period of fellowship with Brother John Young at Synod. Recognizing his sincere devotion and consecrated testimony I therefore requested him to write a letter, which could be sent to our constituents.

His letter was dated last November, and I am to blame for its late arrival to you. I consider it one of the finest observations of our church coming from one whose heart is in it and who has been far enough from us while he was on the Field to get a good view of us. We are all aware that it is sometimes difficult to see the trees because of the forest. Brother John looks back at us from a distant shore and then spends a year in our midst and comes up with an observation, which I think is well worth our consideration. Therefore, as the Moderator of your seventeenth General Synod I commend John's letter to you.

Yours in His Service for the glory of Christ,



L. G. Gebb, Moderator

Some Observations After a Year's Furlough  
John M. L. Young

The blue waters of the vast Pacific are scudding by the freighter's side as I write, taking us for the third time away from America to the great continent of Asia. For an exciting and full year, which seems now to have passed as if it were a month, we have had the joy of visiting the churches, saluting the brethren and rehearsing the things that God hath done and has yet to do in Japan. God gave many open doors for this work and in over forty thousand miles of travel in America I have visited about four-fifths of our Bible Presbyterian Churches. Now I have been asked by our moderator to set down in writing some impressions of our churches as a whole, and any criticisms or constructive suggestions I might have as a result of this quick look during the past year.

To give such observations of the Church as a whole is naturally a difficult thing to do, for so many and varied are our churches, and the situations facing them, that an impression gained at one place may not be typical at all of others. Perhaps the best way for me to proceed then, is simply to present matters to which I feel we will do well to continue to give attention and emphasis.

Bible Presbyterian Unity

Let me begin with the matter of unity, unity amongst our brethren. If I cannot say that I am altogether encouraged with the unity amongst us, at least neither can I say that I am quite discouraged. The fact is that I am hopeful, quite hopeful. There have been no major divisions amongst us for the past year and more, nor do any seem to be on the horizon. In a Church such as ours, born in controversy, with a ministry of rugged individualists, composed of men with a fearless spirit of non-conformity enabling them to stand alone to fight, break with and continue to defy apostasy, that is a hopeful sign! Even more encouraging, however, is an apparent awakening realization that, although as ministers we are where we are today because of our individual, independent action, (under the leading of God) we do need, and must be willing, to be in subjection one to another in the work of the Lord in the presbytery where He has led us. Being individuals with different temperaments and backgrounds, as we seek to preach the Word and build the pure Church of Jesus Christ, we will certainly have differences, which may even be sharp, on matters of emphasis and methods. All must preach the Word and all must reprove and rebuke, for to fail in either is to fail in our ministry; all must seek to win the lost and all must make the effort to expose and warn of apostasy, but no one of us can demand that the others conform exactly to his own pattern of time and effort allotted to those various and essential ministries. None of us, however, dare excuse himself for failing in any of them. We must make "full proof" of our ministry. Unity can only exist where a right tolerance and understanding prevail. As we get to understand each other better, and the great part we have been given in building the Church of God, I am hopeful that our unity will deepen.

Doctrine

The subject of unity easily leads to that concerning the purpose of our union and the doctrinal content around which we have united. Why have we united together to form the Bible Presbyterian Church? Surely the answer must be because we have wanted to preserve the pure Christian Faith in a truly Presbyterian Church. We separated from various modernist Presbyterian Churches, and undertook to build this new one, just because they had, in large measure, forsaken the true faith, while we believe that building the Church of God is of the utmost importance, and that we cannot build it on one hand while tearing it down on the other by working with those who

so do. The Christian Faith is expressed in doctrinal terms. Since denial of this doctrine is the work of the apostasizing Churches, if we are to build a true and pure church we must ever be at the business of indoctrinating our people in the great principles of the Word of God. A Church is no stronger than the convictions of its people. In our Westminster standards we have a wonderful summary of the doctrinal content of the Bible, but if we get sidetracked from this all-important work of feeding the flock of God on all the counsel of God, that is of constant instruction in the "basic principles centering around our sovereign, triune God, and fall into the all too easy fault of becoming too engrossed with some particular doctrine or into rest, such as eschatology or current events, then our people will lack the essential instruction necessary to "build the deep convictions of a strong Church. We united to preserve our God-given Faith and build a truly Presbyterian Church, but we cannot do this if we fail to be doctrinal preachers.

#### The Separationist Issue

Nor dare we forget the controversy out of which we sprang. Other Churches in history have failed sufficiently to inform the new generations of the cause of their origin, with the result that, as time went on, this was gradually forgotten, and thus they lost their distinctive testimony. The apostasy of our day has caused us to see with new force the importance of the doctrine of the preservation of the purity of the Church and its co-ordinate, the necessity of separation from apostasy. These we must not fail to hold up before our people. At the same time we must remember that no strong Church can be built on one doctrine and thus not allow our proximity to this issue cause us to give a disproportionate amount of attention in our preaching to this doctrine, to the neglect of others. We separated not for separation's sake but for the doctrine's sake, to build a Church to preserve and proclaim it, to be a pillar and ground of the truth, and this must be our major effort.

If the separationist testimony around the world is to be maintained and expanded the Bible Presbyterian Church must be strong. It is interesting to note that in the field of inter-Church cooperation abroad, in almost every instance the cause was sparked by a Bible Presbyterian, and then became dependent upon the Bible Presbyterian ministers in those foreign lands for its maintenance as a virile witness. If our Church had not been strong enough to provide these ministers, and send them abroad under the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, there is probably not a place abroad where the work of interdenominational cooperation for the purpose of advancing the separationist cause would exist today. This is part of our mission to our age in the work of building the Church of God, and if our Church is not strong the whole thing will falter. But the strength of a Church rests on the people's understanding of the greatness of their God and their devotion to carrying out His precepts, which calls for ceaseless indoctrination of the whole council of God by their ministers. For a minister to content himself in his preaching with dealing almost exclusively with the issues of the day, the doctrine of separation and its co-ordinate doctrine of the Church's purity, to the virtual exclusion of a well-rounded presentation of all the great doctrines of our Westminster standards, or vice versa, would be as unwise and unscriptural as it would be for one to support home missions exclusively and ignore foreign missions, or vice versa.

#### The Ministry

None can deny the importance of a well trained ministry for the building of a strong Church. We have set high standards in this regard, and we must maintain them. Tremendously encouraging is our development of colleges in full conformity with our unique standards. To have our prospective ministers indoctrinated with our Westminster standards and separationist principles this early in their training should be a great strengthening to them and a decisive factor in holding them to fulfill their call to become Bible Presbyterian ministers. But college education alone must never be allowed gradually to take the place of the required college and seminary training. Nor should a diploma from our approved seminary, Faith, be accepted in place of a thorough examination by presbytery for ordination. The faculty of Faith would be the first to agree with this. Faith, as other evangelical seminaries, does not require full agreement with all of its instruction for graduation. A student can graduate while still holding either the Baptist or Arminian errors, and it is obligatory for presbyteries to determine for themselves whether or not a candidate for ordination really has a whole-hearted acceptance of our standards.

#### The Eldership

The eldership also is of great importance in building a strong Church. Perhaps we are more tempted to become careless here than we are in the matter of judging the qualifications of a minister, yet a mistake in the one place can be almost as fatal as one in the other. An elder, like a minister, must first of all be one called of God to his office, with the session then considering the evidence of the call. A congregation can ask a man if he does not feel called to the eldership, or ask him to prayerfully consider it, but how can it tell a man he is called of God to be an elder simply by electing him to be one? Some of our congregations have run into serious eldership troubles, I believe, because they have overlooked the fact that an older

**[Our copy at the PCA Historical Center, in Box 328, folder 11, ends here; at least one page is missing. George P. Hutchinson cites a portion of this letter in his book *The History Behind the RPCES*, on p. 273, footnote 78.]**