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 know Him…” (Emphasis added) Christ’s statement, “…but you know Him…”, started me on a blessed journey that continues. The Greek word used here


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.
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.
changing culture, was published in 1983. 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, “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 the 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 god’s will that i continue. 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 changing culture, 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.

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)
Business.” An article I had written in Business Horizons in 1984, 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!