



PAIDEIA CENTER

FOR THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLESHIP

DISCUSSION LEADER GUIDE



MARTIN BUCER,
CONCERNING THE TRUE CARE OF SOULS



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with perpetual guilt, condemnation, and judgment, people are living with greater joy, peace, and assurance of their righteousness in Christ. This is what the grace revolution is all about! It is a revolution of God's amazing love. A revolution of favor, a revolution of restoration, and a revolution of people's lives transformed by a powerful encounter with our Lord Jesus.

Separation versus Intimacy

The grace revolution is a revolution of relationship. The old covenant of law was about rules, religion, and regulations. The new covenant of grace is all about relationship. The old covenant of law created separation between God and His people; the new covenant of grace brings intimacy between God and His children.

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Let me take you to see what really happened when the law was given at the foot of Mount Sinai. Before God's people had even heard the Ten Commandments, they proclaimed, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Exod. 19:8). This statement reflects man's pride and self-confidence. This is not an indictment against the children of Israel, but against all men who boast they can keep all of God's laws. When people say that they can keep God's laws even before they have heard what those laws are, that is putting confidence in the flesh. That is pride.

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A Revolution of Relationship

So at the foot of Mount Sinai, when man boasted in his own self-sufficiency that he would keep God's laws, God's tone immediately changed. The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, "You shall set bounds for the people around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow, whether man or beast, he shall not live'" (Exod. 19:12-13).

My dear friend, that's the law of the old covenant. Just take a moment and imagine you are at the foot of Mount Sinai. See it as it is described in the Word of God: "Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly" (Exod. 19:18).

This is the terrifying place to be at. Don't take my word for it; read for yourself. This is all documented for us in the book of Exodus. "Now all the people witnessed the thundering, the lightning, flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, 'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die'" (Exod. 20:18-19).

The old covenant of the law was a covenant that was void of relationship. It was a covenant of distance and separation from God. The people, seized by fear, didn't want God to speak to them. That was (and still is) the effect of the law.

When God's people presumed on their own righteousness (reflecting the pride in every person's heart, making them believe they can actually do all that God demands), God unleashed upon them His righteous standards and immediately a division and distance came

DISCUSSION LEADER GUIDE

MARTIN BUCER

*Concerning the True Care of Souls*¹



INTRODUCTION

If there is a mathematical ratio for being the most impactful yet least remembered sixteenth century Reformer, Martin Bucer would be among the top contenders. Certainly, he has been remembered and studied among professional historians, but not sufficiently by pastors and practitioners. This seems most attributable to three factors: 1) he didn't produce magisterial tomes on the scale of Calvin or Luther; 2) a great proportion of his work, including his writing, was expended directly in the local and regional ecclesiastical sphere, and 3) his greatest and abiding influence has been through the work of others, most notably Calvin and significantly through Cranmer. On this basis, David Wright says in the introduction to *The True Care of Souls* (hereafter TCS)

“...it may be fairer to describe Calvin as Buceran, than to determine, anachronistically, whether, and to what extent, Bucer was a Calvinist. Certainly, through the far-flung influence of the Genevan Reformation, Buceran patterns of evangelical practice and teaching were adopted in all the strongholds of Reformed Protestantism” (TCS xiii).

Scott Manetsch goes so far as to say “It is only a slight exaggeration to say that it was in Strasbourg that Calvin learned to be a pastor... More than anything, it was Bucer's friendship and fatherly support that helped Calvin regain his sense of vocation to Christian ministry and proved decisive in shaping his future career as a church reformed.”²

Although ultimately unsuccessful in effecting a united Protestant front, Bucer expended great effort in attempting to convince Luther not to make consubstantiation a decisive matter. These efforts did contribute, however, to ongoing relations between Strasbourg and the Swiss reformers. During Bucer's exile to England, his advice and commentary on the Edwardian prayerbook (*The Censura*) was incorporated to a great extent in the prayerbook's second edition. His influence was felt even as far away as Bohemia with the Czech translation of TCS completed in 1543. In Constantin Hopf's view, Bucer “will be seen to have made a contribution to the Reformation as essential to its understanding as that attributed to Lutheranism and Zwinglianism.”³

Timeline

1491	Born in Sélestat, France
1518	Attended Heidelberg Disputation
1521	Attended Diet of Worms, released from Dominican vows
1522	Married Elizabeth
1523	To Strasbourg
1524	Installed as pastor, St. Thomas Cathedral (Strasbourg)
1529	Marburg Colloquy
1533-34	Series of synods in Strasbourg
1533	First Strasbourg Synod; setback when civil authorities revise draft on discipline
1536	Mediated Protestant differences through Wittenberg Concord
1538	First (German) publication of TCS
1538-41	Calvin's exile to Strasbourg
1549	Fled Strasbourg under Augsburg Interim to Cambridge, appointed Regius Professor of Divinity
---	First Edwardian prayerbook (BCP) published
1550	<i>The Censura</i> , a critique of first BCP, delivered to King Edward
---	Completed <i>De Regno Christ</i> , theological treatise in the form of an exhortation to Edward VI to assert himself in the English Reformation
1551	Died in Cambridge
1552	Critiques included in second BCP

¹ Trans. Peter Beale (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2009). Throughout here referred to as TCS.

² Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536-1609*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25.

³ Constantin Hopf, *Martin Bucer and the English Reformation* (London: Blackwell, 1946), x.

Bucer's influence also extended Presbyterian polity to the Midlands, Borderlands, Scotland, and The Netherlands, inasmuch as John à Lasco followed Bucer's church order in organizing the Stranger's Church in London, where the many Reformation exiles sojourned. Upon returning to their home regions, they fostered the imitation of Presbyterian governance.⁴

A. Background

Martin Bucer, the son and grandson of coopers, was born in Sélestat, France, along the German border. This was thirty miles from Strasbourg, France, where he would serve for fifteen years, and two hundred miles from Geneva, Switzerland, where his protégé John Calvin would carry out a reformation reflecting Bucer's great impact on his thinking. Classically educated, in his teens he joined the Dominican order and was eventually ordained a deacon. Having witnessed the Heidelberg Disputation of Luther, he soon developed sympathies with the ideas of Luther as well as Erasmus, which put him at risk of inquisition by his order. To avoid the prospect, he managed to receive an annulment of his Dominican vows with the assistance of the future fellow drafter of the Tetrapolitan Confession, Wolfgang Capito.⁵

1. Writings

Bucer's *oeuvre* consists of a number of notable writings including commentaries on Psalms, the Gospels, and Ephesians, as well as contributions to numerous works aimed at larger Protestant unity, such as the Tetrapolitan Confession, and aimed at reformation in Strasbourg where he was navigating the challenges of a mixed population and a cautious consistory. Aside from TCS, his best-known monograph was *de Regno Christi*, which was both his theological *summa* and an exhortation to England's King Edward VI to lead the Reformation forward in Bucer's exilic home. Aside from his direct influence upon Calvin and, through Calvin, his indirect influence on the continental Reformation, Bucer's most widespread impact was the *Book of Common Prayer* through Cranmer, particularly the second edition, and thus upon Anglicanism. Whether Bucer had in him a work on the scale of Calvin's *Institutes* we will never know, but if he did, it was sacrificed on the altar of ecclesiastical and ecumenical service. Neither, however, will we ever need Bucer's magnum opus, for we have it in and through Calvin's *Institutes*.

2. Labors

Bucer's labors in Strasbourg reflected the broader challenges of the Reformation. In the Reformation's recoil against late medieval errors and abuses, what was the proper place and role for the external forms of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the ministry? How could the church in a city like Strasbourg, in which virtually everyone was baptized, truly reflect a biblical character, especially since the practice of the late medieval confessional historically provided automatic access to communion? If the confessional was eliminated, by what mechanism could the unbelieving baptized be precluded and, more importantly, how could the opportunity be seized to convert the baptized? Among the volatile elements of Strasbourg were the many Anabaptists, who had been attracted there because of its relatively tolerant climate. While they clamored for greater scrutiny of the baptized, the civil authorities, generally supportive of reform, were unwilling to entirely relinquish control of church matters back to the clergy, when the church hierarchy had been the principal cause of the errors and abuses in the first place. Moreover, from the standpoint of civil authorities, caution was in order so as not to precipitate the kind of social upheaval which had occurred in the German territories. Radical reforms risked over-agitating an already restless populace.

⁴ Steven Paas, *Minister and Elders: The Birth of Presbyterianism*. Kashere Theses 24 (Nürnberg: VTR Publishing, 2011), 67-68.

⁵ Whose widow, Wibrandis Rosenblatt, was initially married to Johannes Oecolampadius and would go on to marry Bucer after Capito's death.

B. Bucer's Development

A diachronic reading of Bucer's life might lead to the impression that he was a changeable man. On at least one occasion—the divorce of Philip of Hesse—he is judged by some to have compromised principle for pragmatism.⁶ In fact, according to Wright, “his ingenious resourcefulness made him suspect of unprincipled pliability to some,”⁷ from his early efforts to reconcile Protestants and Catholics on through his attempts to mediate the Protestant reformers, even at one time including radical reformers. In a certain sense that is true. As the light of the Reformation rises, things become more clear. Additionally, the interactions of the various forces call for realignments. Whether the rhythm of swells or the winds fair or foul, a seaman cannot stand firm by simply standing still. As Bucer navigates the developing and opposing forces of Anabaptists and Lutherans, the capacity and pace of change within his own parishes, and the possibilities and realities of the Protestant face-off against Rome, he stands firm by allowing his views and solutions to develop accordingly. To our great good, we possess in *Concerning the True Care of Souls* a fully formed description of the pastoral task.

Initially Bucer shows more sympathies with the Anabaptists than with Luther—what we might call his “Zwinglian cage stage.” Eventually—and this is the primary core around which TCS should be read—Bucer came back around to affirm the material and instrumental nature of the minister, the sacraments, and discipline. Contra the Anabaptists, he drew the line for discerning and confirming faith at the Lord's Supper rather than at baptism. He arrived at a practice which resolved the communion dilemma in something very like what we know today as “communicants” or “confirmation” training.

“Of all the Reformers, Bucer alone developed his understanding of catechetical instruction in relation to confirmation. Zwingli and Calvin believed that Baptism entails catechetical instruction, and Bucer argued that catechetical instruction entails confirmation. By this he meant a heartfelt profession of faith and pledge of obedience in which the essential tenets of the faith are not merely grasped intellectually but are appropriated personally. This alone is a sign that the Spirit is at work in a person's life, leading to ratification of the baptismal covenant.”⁸

While Luther maintained the necessity of the confessional, in Bucer's practice the sacrament of penance was replaced by instruction and discipline. Amy Nelson Burnett sees Bucer's emphasis on discipline as a direct outgrowth of his development in seeing the value of the external in relation to the internal.⁹

C. About the Book

TCS is a development and application of God's promise in Ezekiel 34:11-16. Following an overwhelming indictment upon the shepherds of Israel for making the sheep of Israel a prey and declaring his divine opposition to them in all his omnipotence (vv 1-10), God promised that he himself would act as Israel's shepherd (vv 11-17). In all the responsibilities that the leaders of Israel had failed, God would perform. These functions provide the outline of Bucer's full-blown pastoral theology: seeking the lost, restoring the strays, binding up the wounded, strengthening the weak, and guarding and feeding the strong. Regarding this last function Bucer is vulnerable to a mistranslation of v 16 by the Greek OT and, hence, the Vulgate. The Hebrew **וַיִּשָׁרְטוּ**, “to destroy,” is mistakenly rendered **φύλασσω**, “to watch over.” Nevertheless, the care and feeding of the healthy sheep is fundamental to pastoral care and properly considered. Before expounding on these functions, however, Bucer must (re)establish the material and instrumental role of the church and the ministry in how Christ provides for his church. Therefore, the first six chapters outline the role of the pastor (and elders) with the next six chapters developing this role into how the church's shepherds must rule. A final brief chapter is a detailed outline of the book, which the reader may find helpful to read first. Readers will note that the longest chapter (chapter 9) is on “penance.” It becomes readily apparent he is commending something far different than the sacramental penance of the confessional. This form of penance should be rare rather than regular, restorative rather than exculpatory, and the means of securing genuine repentance rather than short-circuiting it.

⁶ Bucer was among those who cited examples of bigamy in scripture as warrant for the pro-Reformation Philip to take a second wife in Margarethe von der Saale instead of divorcing Christina and he ultimately participated in performing the nuptials. For more, see H. Selderhuis, *Marriage and Divorce in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, trans. John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies XLVIII (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999).

⁷ TCS xii.

⁸ Richard Robert Osmer, *Confirmation: Presbyterian Practices in Ecumenical Perspective* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1996), 78.

⁹ Amy Nelson Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ: Martin Bucer and Christian Discipline* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 4.

According to Wright, in responding to a Czech delegation requesting translation of the book, Bucer responded that “he had written it for the benefit of those who sought in the ministry of the Strasbourg pastors more a way of casting off the papal yoke than of submitting to the yoke of Christ. They detested discipline beyond reason” (xv). For Bucer, “discipline” meant “that all members of Christ recognize and embrace each other most intimately and lovingly, and that they build one another up in the knowledge of and obedience to the Son of God most zealously and efficaciously, and that the ministers of the churches know, care for and tend the individual sheep of Christ, as the chief pastor Christ set the example...In countless places in Scripture, the Lord described and set forth for us this [discipline] which we have also proclaimed so clearly for so many years in life and writings and sermons.”¹⁰ Burnett later summarizes: “the rejection of eucharistic rigorism, the importance of admonition, the use of excommunication only as a last result, and the definition of the power of the keys are all familiar elements in Bucer’s thought.”¹¹

D. Bucer's Relevance

While we find the Reformation theologically accessible and relevant for our time, this background may tempt us to view the sixteenth century as irrelevant to pastoral practice, because of the idiosyncrasies of that time in contrast to those of our own. They lived in a Christian state, we in a pluralistic society. Their church world was one of parishes, ours is one of designer churches. Ecclesiastical authority was material in that time, even if it was in upheaval. Today the “faithful” wander between churches like fast casual dining establishments.

However, such a temptation is overcome when we look more closely. Bucer’s challenges are our challenges. What is the nature of ecclesiastical authority? How can we be genuinely catholic in a fractious age? How do we move people from the baptized nominalism of revivalistic spirituality to committed discipleship? How do we bolster the role of the church among those who see it as an elective association? How can we reintroduce a diet of redemptive church discipline to those who have been starved of it their whole lives? How, when many are suspicious of ecclesiastical authority while simultaneously being vulnerable to the cult of personality, can we reclaim the keys of the kingdom without being self-serving? In TCS we find a mature pastoral practice tested in the fires of ecclesiastical reality on the individual, parish, and ecumenical stages. It is precisely because it was forged in the real world of church and culture that we can look to it and lean on it.

E. For Further Reading

Bucer, Martin. *Common Places of Martin Bucer*. Ed. and trans. D. F. Wright. Abingdon, UK: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972.

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Thompson, Bard. *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 2015. Atlanta: Fortress Press, 1980. Chapter VI, “Martin Bucer, The Strassburg Liturgy.”

¹⁰ TCS, xvii, cited from Burnett, 1.

¹¹ Burnett 68.



1ST MONTH

Concerning the True Care of Souls, pp. ix-73, 211-14

“May the Lord grant that it will be of much use for his kingdom. For indeed, this work of the true care of souls, ordained by the Lord and so necessary for the welfare of the church, is still properly understood by very few. May the Lord make it properly understood and dear to us all. Amen” (214).

Preparing to read

Encourage your group members to read the summary (211-14) first in order to get oriented toward the book’s larger argument. Each chapter begins with relevant Scripture passages and generally follows the order of these passages as presented. Therefore, the Scripture passages that begin each section should be reflected upon first. Note that the table of contents is on p. xxvii. Reference notes are found at the end of each chapter. Consider inviting group members to mark at least one passage from the assigned reading which they found particularly striking, helpful, or challenging. As time allows these can be shared during discussion.

A. Overview

Chapters 1-6 establish the nature of the church, how Christ rules the church through his servants, and what the principal work of that rule is. Chapter 7 addresses the first of the five ways in which that work is to be done. Bucer’s purpose is stated in the very first paragraph: “...that [all believers] may rightly recognize and love [Christ’s] church and the fellowship of his people” (xxxix). He saw the church of his day as scattered, similar to Israel in exile as addressed in Ezekiel 34, and that it must be restored by a thorough understanding of “what the church of Christ is, what rule and order it must have, who its true ministers are and how they are to exercise their ministry in the care of souls and the pastoral office for the true salvation of Christ’s lambs” (xxxiii). “From these every Christian can thoroughly learn what sort of fellowship the church of Christ is, how Christ the Lord alone rules, what ministry he requires in that rule and how this ministry is to be ordered and performed, in relation to all those who are brought to the church of Christ and wish to be kept and built up in it” (xxxiv).

Bucer begins laying this foundation with the fundamental unity of the church both spiritually and temporally (chapter 1) and the exclusive authority of Christ over the church (chapter 2). It’s especially incumbent upon those who are chosen for the pastoral office to understand this (15), because the pastoral office is the means by which Christ himself carries out his pastoral office (chapter 3). There is no dichotomy between this being the ministry of man and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (21-22).¹² The larger ministry of the church is to be exercised in a variety of ways, including ministry to those in need by deacons (chapter 4). More narrowly, the ministry of the pastoral office is to bring Christ’s sheep into his sheep pen and keep them there as they grow into godliness and Christ likeness by “teaching, exhorting, warning, disciplining, comforting, pardoning, and reconciling to the Lord and his church: in other words, the proclaiming of the whole word of God” (33). In order to be able to carry out this work, it requires pastors to have “a reputation, a sense of awe, and an example of life.” Because people are so varied, this work requires a variety of pastors sufficient in number according to the congregation’s need (35). The people are to have a role in choosing their shepherds, although they must choose according to

¹² For a classical formulation reconciling a high view of the office of minister with the priesthood of all believers, see Second Helvetic Confession 18.

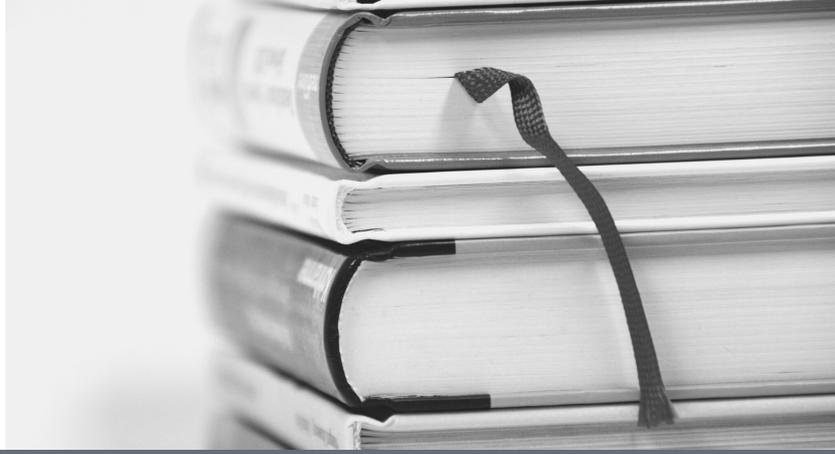
Christ's will (chapter 5). Choosing according to other criteria, even learnedness and eloquence, inappropriately excludes persons of different classes and types of people. There is also to be a plurality of shepherds, "because all skill and ability comes from God, who desires to carry out his work in his church by means of many and not by means of few" (58). This work consists principally of five things, the first of which is seeking the lost sheep (chapter 7). This seeking must be done diligently and persistently and is not complete until the sheep have entered the church, Christ's sheep-pen, and given themselves wholly to Christ as their shepherd. There is no contradiction between God's sovereign election and persistent and diligent seeking (77). "Christ's salvation is to be experienced exclusively and entirely in the communion of Christ," so that entry into and remaining within Christ's sheep pen are essential (79).

B. Discussion Prompts

1. Based on the description of Bucer's context in the introduction, discuss similarities and differences between your context and Strasbourg in order to enable and envision how you might profit most from TCS.
2. While the priesthood of all believers was a rallying cry of the Reformation, the reformers also held to the distinctive place and purpose of the ministry. How would you assess the clarity of your own church and the broader church on this matter? What kind of factors underlie that clarity or lack thereof? What kinds of challenges and opportunities does Bucer's delineation present?
3. Given Bucer's emphasis on the responsibility of the congregation to choose its leaders according to Christ's will, how would you assess the contemporary church's ability to do that? What responsibility does the regional church have in training churches to choose accordingly? Given his equal emphasis on the presbyters' role, how well do churches in your ecclesiastical context do in promoting, developing, and recognizing the criteria by which Christ would have the churches choose?
4. "... Those ministers of Christ who abandon the baptized...will find it difficult to give account for them to God and Christ our Lord" (89). Discuss the validity of the statement, your own sense of how well you live by this, and the challenges presented by the contemporary church to do so.
5. As you have time, share notable quotes each member has highlighted.
6. Conclude your discussion time by praying the paragraph that begins at the bottom of page 89.

2ND MONTH

Concerning the True Care of Souls, pp. 91-162



“What is binding and retaining sins other than to bind and hold to penance for their sins those who have sinned and come before the church as sinners who have despised Christ’s redemption and fallen under the wrath of God and eternal damnation, to drive them to seek grace and improvement with all their hearts, with humiliation and mortification of their proud and evil flesh?” (117-118)

A. Overview

Chapters eight and nine address the second and third of Bucer’s five responsibilities of Christ’s undershepherds, the restoration of stray sheep (chapter 8) and the binding and healing of the hurt and wounded through penance (chapter 9). Stray sheep are those which were in the flock but have wandered away, which include both those who have strayed out of love for the world but have not departed entirely from Christ as well as those who have apostatized. Our efforts in bringing back strays should be no less diligent than seeking the lost. Frequently in TCS Bucer reminds us that the work of shepherds is also the work of the whole church (94). These are noteworthy since they reflect a view of office which is far from clericalism. It is the whole church’s work to draw strays to repentance, though the work particularly of shepherds to restore once repentance has appeared.

The hurt and wounded are those who are still within the church but “fall into open and notorious sins and abuses.” Bucer’s use of “penance” might be shocking if it is misunderstood in the same sense of late medieval sacramental penance, which it is not, or if there is unfamiliarity with the instrumental role of the church and the ministry in administering God’s grace. For Bucer, penance is not how one regains right standing with God after gross sin, but rather how one’s repentance may be established as genuine for the conscience of the repentant, the warning to the church, and the witness to the world.

There is not complete dissimilarity between Bucer’s practice and the confessional in the sense that both required developed taxonomies in order to address specific persons and situations, yet their frequency, purpose, and method diverge greatly. Bucer’s approach is not unlike the eventually sophisticated development of soul care among the Puritans with their elaborate taxonomies such as Richard Baxter’s *Directory* or Thomas Brooks’s *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*. An apt analogy is to that of a physician. A cure can only follow a careful diagnosis, the proper prescription must be chosen carefully, applied diligently, and succeeds only when health is restored. The good physician not only diagnoses and prescribes, but follows through until the cure is achieved. Therefore, the sorrow which the sinner feels must be nursed toward “repentance on the life” so as not to become “sorrow unto death” (2 Cor 7:5-12; Westminster Shorter Catechism 87). This process must be done with great care and love, for to shepherd like Christ, a bruised reed must not be broken (Mt 12:20).

Bucer illustrates, as did Calvin, with the episode in which Ambrose was compelled to confront Emperor Theodosius for an indiscriminate response to an uprising. By using the example of someone so mightily being subjected to Christ’s church it shows that there is no sheep above Christ’s yoke. “[T]rue sorrow and subjected to

Christ's church it shows that there is no sheep above Christ's yoke. "[T]rue sorrow and commitment to reformation following more serious and grosser sins is not proved by someone just turning away from the sin he has committed and saying, 'I am sorry, I won't do it again'" (118). Yet as with all cures, penance has dangers when it is overly severe and drives sheep from the sheep pen, rejecting discipline altogether. "Better weak penance and meagre reformation than none at all" (124).

While public penance is reserved for public and/or graver sin, healing and binding is to be performed regularly for less serious sin through pastoral instruction. "Christians confess and repent of the sins and transgressions in all their prayers and godly exercises, whether on their own or in the divine assembly. And whenever the carers of souls encourage this general and daily confession, repentance and reformation by their faithful exhortation, they are healing the sheep of Christ of these daily, less serious injuries" (121).

B. Discussion Prompts

1. How does Bucer's view of the church and the ministry as instrumental and material underlie the practice of penance as he describes it?
2. Talk through the steps which Bucer carefully prescribes for penance. What are the challenges and opportunities with an individual in each of the steps?
3. How does Bucer understand "binding and loosing?"
4. Discuss the importance of the perceived character of shepherds in implementing discipline. Additionally, what is the role of expectations among the church's members, both the subject as well as the rest of the members?
5. Discuss Bucer's defense of withholding the sacrament from those who have expressed repentance (132-39)? What is the purpose of doing so and do you find his rationale convincing?
6. Give your honest assessment of the prospects of Bucer's program of repentance given the mobility of contemporary church attenders?
7. As you have time, share notable quotes each member has highlighted.
8. Conclude with praying the closing sentence on p. 162.



3RD MONTH

Concerning the True Care of Souls, pp. 163-218

“There is nothing which Christians on earth should more diligently guard against, than that anyone should place a strange yoke on them in the name of Christ. We have been purchased by Christ our Lord, and therefore we are to make sure that we do not become slaves of man, I Corinthians 7 [: 23]. By this purchase we are Christ’s lambs, we are his one church and congregation, and therefore we must also have the Lord’s teachers and ministers, whom we listen to in his name and follow with great humility, obedience and submissiveness. This is because it is the Lord’s will to rule among us through his appointed ministry...” (195-96).

A. Overview

Weak sheep are those who are weak because of some trial, do not find their sufficiency in Christ by faith, do not adequately understand their salvation, or have succumbed to sin. Such weaknesses are the result of ignorance of the faith or weakness in faith in the gospel. The general cure for such weaknesses is the means of grace. Through the Word those in sin are shown the errors of their ways and those who are ignorant are to be instructed. This is to be done with kindness and gentleness in order to give hope and not overburden the weak. Love for the world is to be diminished by proving that every good and perfect gift is from God. This is the work of all Christians (171) and especially Christ’s shepherds.

The healthy must be kept in health by being guarded and being fed. Once again, this is the work of the whole church in mutual admonition and encouragement (176), but especially of those who have authority over others. The goal of guarding and feeding is for all to walk according to the grace and calling of God (177). Yet feeding alone is not sufficient since there are “mangy sheep and false goats which disguised themselves for a time in sheep’s clothing” (183). Those who persist in unhealth or error and are unrepentant will gain followers and thus must be excluded from Christ’s sheep pen (184ff). This exclusion may result in repentance for some as discussed in chapter 9. Yet even when excluded from the church, unbelievers are to be treated in such a way that they can lay no blame on Christians for their state (186). We are to love our enemies and we are to do good to all men.

B. Discussion Prompts

Be selective of the following questions in order to have time to discuss question 6.

1. What might Bucer say or how would his pastoral theology have developed in the face of more recent paradigm shifts in the ministry such as the triumph of the therapeutic or the managerial revolution?
2. In a time when Christians are caricatured by non-Christians for alleged hate or bigotry, how does Bucer guide us in how we are to relate to nonbelievers?
3. How has the church undermined its witness by its inconsistency in who it excludes? How does Bucer speak to that?
4. What kind of burden does Bucer, rather Scripture itself, put upon carers of souls as examples of sharing in Christ's sufferings? How does the "command of Christ" (192) make this burden bearable?
5. What tangible things can we do to commend the ministry to Christ's sheep so that they might commend themselves to Christ in obedience to the ministry?
6. Comprehensive question covering the whole book: Bucer prescribes a comprehensive, but perhaps idyllic-seeming vision of the care of souls. Yet he is an example of personal development as he faced and adapted to different challenges and achieved significant accomplishments that were less than the ideal. What does Bucer, a real pastor in a real place at a real time in history, teach us about the relationship between conviction and the "art of the possible" in leading the church toward the fulness of the stature of Christ in our time?
7. As you have time, share notable quotes each member has highlighted.
8. Conclude by praying together the final paragraph of page 193.