

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

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May 5, 2020

To: My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

A time of crisis is revealing, particularly in regard to leadership. In times such as the present pandemic, we look to leaders to lead. Leaders under extreme pressure reveal themselves for who they really are. I have little or no interest in politics. I don't follow politics and I rarely talk about politics. This is one time when I am going to break from that guiding principle of my life.

When I was minister of Graceview Presbyterian Church in Etobicoke, I worked right in the middle of that area of Toronto known as "Ford Nation". Rob Ford was the Mayor of Toronto and so it was impossible not to be aware of municipal politics to a certain extent. He made front page news week after week. I was not impressed with the Ford brothers, either Rob or Doug. Rob Ford died just as my time at Graceview was coming to an end. That left his older brother Doug.

So imagine my chagrin when Doug Ford became the Premier of Ontario in June of 2018. You need to realize that it had nothing to do with his political party affiliation because I don't trust political labels. I am jaundiced enough to feel that all politicians are tarred with the same brush. ("How can you tell if a politician is lying? His/her lips are moving!") I just didn't care for Doug Ford and his performance in his first year and a half in office, what little I was aware of, did not impress. But since the COVID-19 crisis hit the fan, I have been paying more attention to politics – and to Doug Ford. From what I can see and read, he has gained a lot more credibility in terms of his leadership during this pandemic. He has acted and spoken in ways that I never expected he was capable of. I believe that in the middle of this crisis he has demonstrated a real concern for the people of this province and has shown some positive leadership qualities. This does not mean that I am now a Conservative. It means I have a greater appreciation and respect for Doug Ford than I had before.

We are Canadians, and so it is in our nature to do what our government tells us to do. When they say come home, we come home. When they tell us to self-isolate, we self-isolate. We are also Christians and when the Bible tells us to do something, I trust we

***"... a place to belong!"***



take it seriously. In 1 Timothy 2 we read: **1 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people — 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.** I have been remiss in that I have not encouraged you to pray more for our governments – federal, provincial and municipal.

Now I want to change direction. Just before the big lockdown started, the leadership at St. Andrew's was encouraging our church family to take part in a study called "What is Reformed Theology?" with R. C. Sproul. The 25 minute long sessions are available on RightNow Media and anyone who has internet access and is part of our church family (and that includes members of our "virtual church" family) can have access to RightNow Media at no cost simply by asking me. It is hard to find a good introduction to Reformed Theology because, unlike 150 years ago, the vast majority of evangelical Christians lean towards Arminian theology. I have found the talks by R. C. Sproule helpful and I have learned a lot. However, there have been some criticisms. He uses really big words and that makes him hard to understand. If you think the videos are bad, you should try the book!! I don't know why he does this. I have spent my whole ministry trying to make the Christian faith simple for people to understand, so I use common ever day words in my preaching and teaching. But then I am not a theologian. I have nothing else to offer you, so all I can do is apologize for this.

But there is another matter that I want to mention. While I find this study excellent, I have read other material by R.C. Sproul and with some of it I have a disagreement. The case in point relates to the Holy Spirit. Presbyterian and Reformed churches have always favoured an educated clergy. This is a good thing, but if taken to an extreme the end result can be "scholasticism" where intellectual understanding trumps the working of the Holy Spirit. Many Reformed teachers (as well as many other evangelicals) believe in what is called "cessationism"— meaning that the age of miracles ended with the death of the last apostle. I have a problem with that. In the words of Hebrews 13: **8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.** If Jesus is the same, then the Holy Spirit is the same and is able to do the same work today that he did in Bible times. I would say that R.C. is a strong teacher, but I believe that his teaching does an injustice to the on-going work of the Holy Spirit.

What is my point? It is possible to accept the majority of someone's teaching, but to differ at some points. The Reformed family of churches is weaker because its beliefs in this area do not give the Holy Spirit his full rightful place in the life of Christ's Church. It is my prayer that as a church, we need to be more open to the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. In these days, let us not quench the work of the Holy Spirit, but be filled and empowered daily by his presence.

Your servant in Christ,  
Rev. Stephen Dunkin

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