The following is compiled from comments made by Joe Patrick, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Erskine College and Theological Seminary at the board’s February 16-17 meetings on the Erskine campus in Due West, South Carolina.

Excerpted comments ending the plenary session of the board:
The reality right now is that the ARP and Erskine need each other. For nearly 175 years have been woven together in a strong strand, which can continue into a beautiful tapestry of God’s work if we will not fight each other. If we continue listening, loving and serving each other. Public fighting does not accomplish anything but damage to both the ARP and Erskine. And worse, it is seen by both the evangelical and academic communities who are watching us as unbiblical and unwise (Gal 5). This reflection of Erskine and the ARP is not accurate because historically we are biblical and wise, so let’s show that we are by our actions.

Erskine needs to maintain a high view of Scripture to stay true to its Christ-centered mission. Erskine must be a place where people tell the truth at all times. That truth must be spoken gracefully, sincerely and lovingly (Eph 4:15), so the beauty of the Gospel is not tarnished, thus pushing people away from saving grace. This view is not at all counter to the academic excellence that has defined Erskine for so many generations.

Erskine and ARP leaders must put off man-centered ways of thinking and doing, and be rooted in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. This approach requires leaders to let go of their own determination to fix others, and instead receive God’s grace and truth. Then, as we reflect truth in love and service to others, God can do the necessary fixing in His own time.

It is important for the generally quiet environment of the months since Synod 2011 to continue so that leaders of Erskine and Synod can constructively work together to fully understand each other’s concerns as we seek to clarify and settle questions about the relationship between Erskine and the ARP.

Lack of consensus and a less than full embrace of the school’s mission will bring harm to Erskine. No leader in Erskine or the ARP should just be giving a nod and a wink to the respective missions of either of these entities. Many have participated in unraveling the historic shalom (i.e. peaceful interwoven stability) of Erskine and the ARP. Some have not fully engaged in suffering service to Erskine or the ARP, or taken full responsibility for stewarding the good things God has given us in the ARP and Erskine. There has been neglect and mishandling. Leaders both at Erskine and in the ARP need to own it and put it before God to ask Him to help us fix it. He surely can through the synergy of so many gifted people working together with gospel-centered methods.

Erskine is not the possession of the ARP or alumni as much as it is God’s own instrument for loving and serving students in need of truth. Stewardship of Erskine does not belong to those who have an earthly heritage.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).
“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give to you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).
“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:33).

We are called to seek the kingdom of God, but it is entirely God’s to give. We receive the kingdom as we humble ourselves before God and put His kingdom before our own interests and concerns. No individual or group can take credit for receiving the kingdom: “’Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). When the kingdom of God is received in greater and greater measure, the people of God experience God’s power over the world, the flesh, and the devil in greater measure.

“The kingdom of heaven is not of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).

There are at least two ways of missing the mark. We can (as all humanity outside of Christ does) seek to build our own kingdoms, or we can (as many well-meaning Christians do) seek to build His kingdom by our own efforts. We seek to build our own kingdoms by devoting ourselves to the promotion of our own or other’s names and renown. People who give to these kingdoms typically do so expecting their reward in this life.

We can also err by seeking God’s kingdom, but seeking to build it in our image and by our strength. Jerram Barrs: “Indeed, we may say that if we imagine that we are building God’s kingdom for him, we will soon be trying to build our own kingdoms rather than the Lord’s” (The Heart of Prayer: What Jesus Teaches Us, 147).

Whether building our own kingdoms, or pretending to build God’s kingdom for him, the end result is not the reception of the kingdom, but the feeding of human pride, yielding the fruit of the flesh as human power rubs up against human power. When an individual or group repents of these errors, and becomes humble and meek before God, it doesn’t take long to see evidence of the changed posture. The fruit of the Spirit differs radically from the fruit of the flesh (Gal 5).
Questions for Erskine trustees and leaders to consider:

- Have we been caught in a tug-of-war between human-kingdom-preservers ("the Erskine we know and love" / "the Erskine of my family") and heavenly-kingdom-builders ("premier Christian liberal arts college that will attract donors from all over the southeast" / "the college the ARP Church can be proud of")?
- Does the description of the fruit of the flesh describe us? Which fruit specifically?
- If the kingdom of God cannot be built, but only received, what must we focus on doing and on becoming in order to receive more of the kingdom?
- What does seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness look like in the Erskine community?
- Do we have faith that seeking His kingdom will result in all these things being added unto us?