

Theology 101

*A Q&A Approach
to Classic Evangelical Teaching*

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*“I am not crazy...
but boldly declare words of truth and reasonableness.”*

The Apostle Paul (Acts 26:25)

To those pursuing "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

Contents



Abbreviations	9
Preface	11
I. What Is Theology?	13
1. What is theology?	13
2. When did the church start thinking theologically?	15
3. What problems are associated with “doing” theology?	15
4. Why is thinking theologically important when there are all these substantial problems associated with it?	20
5. What are the different approaches to theology?	23
6. What distinguishes traditional Protestant theology from Roman Catholic theology?	25
7. What is evangelical theology?	25
8. How do different approaches to theology relate to each other? ..	26
9. Can anyone be unbiased in their theological work?	27
10. So... to be able to think aright theologically you need a biblical worldview, but to get a biblical worldview you need to think in theological terms... Isn't this circular reasoning?	28
11. What, in a nutshell, is the Biblical worldview we should “inhabit” if we are to approach theology from the right perspective?	29
12. How important is historical theology (i.e. the way the church formulated its teachings in the past) to theology today?	31
II. The Existence of God	32
1. Does God exist?	32
2. Can the existence of God be proved?	34
3. What is the worth of these apologetic arguments?	38
III. Revelation and the Knowledge of God	41
1. What do Christians mean when they say they “know God”?	41
2. What is revelation?	41
3. Why do we need revelation?	42
4. What is general revelation?	43

5.	How useful is general revelation?	43
6.	What is special revelation and why is it needed?	44
7.	What is the nature of special revelation? What is it like?	44
8.	How did/does God reveal Himself?	45
IV.	The Doctrine of Scripture	48
1.	What claims does the Bible make about itself?	48
2.	How was the Bible given?	52
3.	What about allegations that there are mistaken facts and contradictions in the Bible?	57
4.	How can we know that the Bible contains the right books?	59
5.	Is the Bible all there is to “the word of God”?	70
6.	Is revelation ongoing? Does God still reveal things about himself?	71
V.	The Attributes of God	74
1.	What is meant by the phrase “the attributes of God”?	74
2.	How can finite, sinful man know the holy, transcendent God?	75
3.	How are God’s attributes classified?	77
4.	What are the incommunicable attributes of God?	78
5.	What are the communicable attributes of God?	89
VI.	The Names of God	97
1.	What names are used to refer to God?	98
2.	Are there other titles which reflect God’s character?	102
VII.	The Trinity	104
1.	Is God a simple unity?	104
2.	How did Christianity come to accept the doctrine of the Trinity?	106
3.	What is the Biblical basis upon which the church formulated the doctrine of the Trinity?	107
4.	How have people tried to make sense of the doctrine of the Trinity?	111
5.	Why is the doctrine of the Trinity so important?	115
VIII.	Creation	118
1.	How comprehensive is the explanatory power of science?	118

2.	What does the Bible teach about the creator of the universe? ...	119
3.	What do the creation narratives teach about people?	122
4.	What do the creation narratives teach about the natural world?	124
5.	Why did God create the universe?	125
6.	Why did God create human beings?	126
7.	How should we view the physical world?	127
8.	How does the doctrine of creation relate to the theory of evolution?	128
9.	If God created the universe, does he continue to show an interest in it? Is he still involved in his creation?	133
10.	How do God's providence and human evil relate to each other?	138
IX.	Humanity	140
1.	Are human beings in a different category from animals?	140
2.	Where do these fundamental differences come from?	140
3.	How has the fall into sin affected the image of God in humanity?	142
4.	What are some of the practical consequences of being created in the image of God?	142
5.	What elements constitute a human being?	143
6.	What is the origin of the human soul? Where does it come from?	148
X.	Hamartiology: The Doctrine of Sin and the Fall	150
1.	Things are clearly not as they should be with both the natural world and people. Why is that?	150
2.	How does the Bible describe sin?	150
3.	What, exactly, is the relationship between the law of God and sin?	153
4.	Are people who live without the knowledge of God's law culpable when they break it?	155
5.	Should we consider the Genesis account of the fall into sin as historical?	156
6.	What theories are there about the origins and effects of sin and evil?	156

7.	So who is right, the Federalists (Calvin) or the Seminalists (Arminius)?	159
8.	What are the effects of sin on mankind?	160
9.	Where did Satan and the demonic world come from?	165
10.	What is Satan like?	166
11.	What is spiritual warfare?	167
12.	Can I stop worrying about the subject of sin since the Bible teaches that although all have sinned, Jesus forgives them?	172
13.	2 Cor. 5:17 says that as a Christian I am a new creation in Christ. Why do I still sin?	173
14.	How can I overcome my sin nature as a Christian?	174
15.	Is there such a thing as the unpardonable sin?	176
XI.	The Nature and Person of Christ	178
1.	Who is Jesus Christ?	178
2.	What are some inadequate views about the person of Christ?	179
3.	Why does the church insist that Jesus Christ is fully God?	182
4.	Why is Christ's full deity so important?	194
5.	What is meant by the phrase "Christ's state of humility"?	195
6.	How is the unity of the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ expressed?	197
7.	Why does the church insist that Jesus is fully man?	198
8.	Does the Bible actually teach the virgin birth of Christ?	205
9.	What are common arguments against the virgin birth?	206
10.	Why is the doctrine of the virgin conception so important?	206
11.	Does the Bible actually teach that Jesus lived a human life without ever sinning?	208
12.	Was it possible that Jesus could have sinned? After all, God cannot be tested, right? (Jam. 1:13-14)	211
13.	Why was it necessary for Jesus to be sinless?	215
14.	Why was Jesus baptised if he was sinless?	216
XII.	The Death and Resurrection of Christ	218
1.	How do non-Christians regard Christianity's claim that Jesus rose from the dead?	218
2.	What are the known extra-biblical historical facts about Jesus' crucifixion?	219

3.	What other evidence is there that Jesus died and rose from the dead?	223
4.	Who was responsible for Jesus' death?	232
5.	What did Jesus suffer on the cross?	234
6.	Why was Jesus' resurrection so important to our salvation?	234
7.	Did Jesus descend to hell between his death and resurrection? .	240
8.	What is the nature of Christ's resurrection body?	241
XIII. Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA)		243
1.	What is meant by Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA)?	247
2.	Why is PSA necessary?	245
3.	What is meant by the word "atonement"?	247
4.	How was atonement accomplished in the OT?	247
5.	What did the OT sacrificial system actually accomplish in terms of atoning for sin?	249
6.	How was atonement accomplished in the NT?	250
7.	What does the word "penal" in PSA stand for?	250
8.	What does the word "substitution" in PSA stand for?	250
9.	What made Jesus Christ a legally acceptable substitute for sinful mankind?	251
10.	Where do we find the clearest teachings on PSA in the NT?	254
11.	Could God have saved mankind any other way?	256
12.	What other concepts are associated with the doctrine of the atonement?	257
13.	From what are Christians redeemed?	261
14.	Does Christ's offer of redemption also deliver us from sickness?	262
15.	Is penal substitutionary atonement (PSA) the only way to understand Christ's atoning work?	264
16.	What is the New Perspective on Paul?	276
XIV. Soteriology: the Doctrine of Salvation		277
1.	What does Christ's atoning work seek to save us from?	277
2.	Who, exactly, does Jesus save from God's wrath?	282
3.	What does "being saved" mean?	284
4.	What does it mean for God to elect people unto salvation?	285

5. What is predestination (or foreordination)?	287
6. What is the biblical order of salvation (the “ <i>ordo salutis</i> ”)?	288
7. What is the nature of God’s foreknowledge?	290
8. What is meant by “calling”?	292
9. Is there not a contradiction between God wanting all men to be saved and the fact that he only effectively calls some?	296
10. So, teacher, where do you personally stand?	303
11. Are there people whom God determined from eternity would go to hell?	304
12. How does God go about calling people?	306
13. What is meant by the term “regeneration” (or “new birth”)?	307
14. Why do people need to be “born again” or “regenerated”?	308
15. How are people regenerated, or born again?	309
16. What are the results of regeneration?	311
17. How can sinners appropriate God’s grace in Christ for themselves?	312
18. What is repentance?	312
19. What is “true faith”, i.e. a faith that “works” in terms of securing God’s blessings in Christ?	318
20. What does “living by faith” mean?	323
21. How can I be sure I am among the elect?	323
22. What is meant by justification?	324
23. So does our faith earn justification? Is it another form of religious good works or obedience?	325
24. What are the results of justification?	326
25. What is the doctrine of adoption all about?	327
26. What is sanctification?	333
27. What is meant by the perseverance of the saints?	348
28. What does the Bible mean when it speaks about people apostatising? (i.e. abandoning the Christian faith)	351
29. Does Heb. 6:4-6 and 10:26-31 really mean that we can lose our salvation?	354
30. How can the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints encourage Christians?	355
31. What is meant by glorification?	356

XV. Pneumatology: the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit	358
1. Why is there less on the Holy Spirit in the Bible than on God the Father or Jesus Christ?	358
2. If the Spirit is a “behind the scenes” worker, why is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit important?	360
3. What is the Holy Spirit not?	360
4. What symbols does the Bible use to describe the Holy Spirit? ...	361
5. Does the Bible teach that the Holy Spirit is an actual person? ...	363
6. Does the Bible actually teach that the Holy Spirit is divine and co-equal with the Father and the Son?	365
7. What was the Holy Spirit’s role in the OT period?	369
8. What was the Holy Spirit’s work in the NT era?	374
9. What did the Holy Spirit accomplish at Pentecost?	376
10. What does the Holy Spirit seek to do in the life of individual believers?	377
11. What does the Holy Spirit seek to accomplish in the church?	383
12. What about the gift of healing? Is it still valid today?	385
13. Is the gift of tongues still valid today?	385
14. What is the difference between being baptised with the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit?	386
15. What is meant by “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit”?	387
16. Should we pray to the Holy Spirit?	388
XVI. Ecclesiology: the Doctrine of the Church	389
1. What is the difference between a group of believers who meet for Bible study and a church?	389
2. How was the NT church organized?	396
3. What other concepts are associated with the NT idea of church?	404
4. What is meant by the concept “emergent church”?	405
5. Who should run the church?	406
6. Is there a role for women in ministry?	413
7. Why should Christians commit to a church?	414
8. What is involved in being a church member?	418
9. On what basis should churches discipline their members?	421
10. What is the church’s missionary obligation?	424

XVII. Eschatology: the Doctrine of the End Times and the Hereafter ..	431
1. Why does the doctrine of eschatology matter?	431
2. What does the future look like?	433
3. Will the afterlife consist of heaven or a renewed earth?	441
4. Where do believers go after they die and before Christ returns?	443
5. What relationship is there between our service for Christ in this life and in the next?	443
6. How should the doctrine of heaven motivate us?	444
7. Who all will benefit in the future?	445
8. What will be the signs of the end of the age?	446
Appendix 1: What is the New Perspective on Paul?	449
Appendix 2: Four frameworks of Bible Interpretation	456
Appendix 3: What is <i>Missio Dei</i> ?	469
Bibliography	478

Abbreviations

Old Testament

Genesis	Gen.	Ecclesiastes	Ecc.
Exodus	Ex.	Song of Songs	SS
Leviticus	Lev.	Isaiah	Isa.
Numbers	Num.	Jeremiah	Jer.
Deuteronomy	Deut.	Lamentations	Lam.
Joshua	Josh.	Ezekiel	Ezek.
Judges	Jud.	Daniel	Dan.
Ruth	Ru.	Hosea	Hos.
1 Samuel	1 Sam.	Joel	Joel
2 Samuel	2 Sam.	Amos	Am.
1 Kings	1 Kin.	Obadiah	Ob.
2 Kings	2 Kin.	Jonah	Jon.
1 Chronicles	1 Chron.	Micah	Mic.
2 Chronicles	2 Chron.	Nahum	Nah.
Ezra	Ezr.	Habakkuk	Hab.
Nehemiah	Neh.	Zephaniah	Zeph.
Esther	Est.	Haggai	Hag.
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zech.
Psalms	Psa.	Malachi	Mal.
Proverbs	Prov.		

New Testament

Matthew	Mat.	1 Timothy	1 Tim.
Mark	Mk.	2 Timothy	2 Tim.
Luke	Lk.	Titus	Ti.
John	Jn.	Philemon	Phm.
Acts	Ac.	Hebrews	Heb.
Romans	Rom.	James	Jam.
1 Corinthians	1 Cor.	1 Peter	1 Pet.
2 Corinthians	2 Cor.	2 Peter	2 Pet.
Galatians	Gal.	1 John	1 Jn.
Ephesians	Eph.	2 John	2 Jn.
Philippians	Phil.	3 John	3 Jn.
Colossians	Col.	Jude	Jude
1 Thessalonians	1 Thes.	Revelation	Rev.
2 Thessalonians	2 Thes.		

Other

English Standard Version	ESV
New American Standard Bible	NASB
New International Version	NIV
New Testament	NT
Old Testament	OT
Penal Substitutionary Atonement	PSA
Q.	Question
World English Bible	WEB

Preface



FOR MANY YEARS I was a Bible and theology teacher in the Middle East seeking to help ground new believers—many of whom were former Muslims—in the Christian faith. I later became a teacher at Cornerstone, a missionary training college in The Netherlands, where I discovered much to my consternation that many of the fine young Christians preparing for cross-cultural Christian service were not much more theologically aware than those new, former Muslim Christians I had taught earlier. Both those ex-Muslims and those missionaries-in-training had come to love Jesus and trust him as their saviour, yet both found it very difficult to articulate in propositional terms what had actually taken place when they became Christians, and how that should affect their lives.

The situation is not helped by the fact that various new winds of doctrine have been blowing across the evangelical world for some time. Rooted in hyper-tolerant, western postmodernism, they are seeking to redefine major teachings of classical evangelical theology: think of the so-called “New Perspective on Paul” presenting a doctrine of the atonement which Christians of a previous era would not have recognized (see Appendix 1), or the hollowing-out of the idea of Christian evangelism, discipleship and church-planting as the heart of missions by *Missio Dei*, today’s most popular theology of mission (see Appendix 3), or the idea that theology is culturally determined (see Chapter I, Question 3, 3.4).

This book is simply a restatement of the historic evangelical message. It is based on the deep conviction that the Bible is the divinely inspired story of God’s progressive revelation of himself, a story which culminates in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God and the saviour of the world. It is based on the conviction that it clearly teaches the wonderful implications of Christ’s accomplishments, that it is quite easy to formulate a clear, coherent synthesis of this message, and that this message is the good news (i.e. the gospel), which contains the “*faith once delivered to the saints*” which we are “*to contend for*” (Jude 3). It is also based on the conviction that this gospel is able to make anyone, from any culture, “*wise for salvation*” and able to “*equip them for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*” (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

In other words, the Bible is not a hodge-podge of conflicting theologies (i.e. those of Paul, Peter, John, James, etc.), but a harmonious, beautiful, yet variegated unity. In fact, the five men who shook hands on the nature of the gospel (see Acts 15)

produced 21 of the 27 books of the New Testament! It is quite possible to construct a comprehensive worldview based on their message and use of the OT. The purpose of this book is to help Christians do so.

This book is based on lecture notes compiled over many years of teaching. It draws from numerous sources, including notes I inherited from Steve Owen, former principal of Cornerstone and my predecessor there as a theology teacher. I have tried to footnote faithfully, but simply cannot remember all my sources. I hope that will be corrected in a future edition.

I thank Dr. Michael Haykin for his penetrating queries and comments. I also want to express heartfelt gratitude to David Frost, my eagle-eyed friend and theological soul-mate, for proof-reading the manuscript before it went to press. Remaining shortcomings are my responsibility alone.

My sincere hope and prayer is that this book will help enable believers to *“always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with humility and fear”* (1 Peter 3:15).

Peter Pikkert
Hamilton, ON, 2023

I

What is Theology?

“Pay attention to yourself and to your teaching. Continue in these things, for in doing so you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” (1 Tim. 4:16)



WORLDVIEWS ARE based on foundational convictions.¹ For the Christian these are theological in nature.

1. What is theology?

Theology is the study of God in order to better know and relate to him. The word is a compound of the Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (word).

Christian theology consists of reflecting on the nature of God and how he relates to and reveals himself to man, as well as the study of the nature of man, the nature of salvation (acceptance by God) on the basis of Christ’s atoning work, and the future state.

Think of it as faith seeking to understand God’s truth in order to better know and relate to him. It also helps you formulate a genuine, Bible-based worldview.

Ac. 26:25, “I am not crazy... but boldly declare words of truth and reasonableness.”

Good theology provides bible-based answers to such fundamental questions as:

1.1. What is ultimate reality?

Is it God? If so, what does “God” mean? Is he personal or impersonal? If he is personal, can we assume that he is good? Or is he a malignant personal force? Maybe there are multiple gods with different characters? Or is the universe purely material?

The answer to these questions will define the context for the rest of one’s assumptions.

¹ See box “What is a worldview?”, p. 15.

1.2. What is the nature of the world around us?

Did it come into being as the result of an orderly, divinely controlled creative process or was it an autonomous, random, chaotic event?

The answer decides how you relate to it and how you perceive its future development and your own role in that.

1.3. What is a human being?

Is he a complex biological machine? An evolved ape? Or individuals made in God's image? And what does this mean?

The answer decides the value one gives one's self and others.

1.4. What happens at death?

Personal extinction? Reincarnation? A shadowy existence on "the other side"? Heaven? Hell? What is hell?

The answer will shape one's values: what are you willing to live and die for?

1.5. How is it possible to know anything at all?

This is the question of epistemology. Is it because people are made in the image of an all-knowing God? Or because consciousness and rationality result from eons of evolutionary development?

The answer will affect the relative importance of certain kinds of knowledge vis-à-vis other types of knowledge.

1.6. How do we know right from wrong?

Is it determined because people are created in the image of a God whose character determines that which is right from wrong, good and bad? Or is it determined by human choices based on a hedonistic sense of what feels good, or on ideas of cultural or physical survival? Is there even such a thing as free, human choice that enables people to create their own set of values?

The answer will form the foundation of your ethics.

1.7. What is the meaning of human history?

Is it essentially meaningless or is someone (or some force) in charge? Is it to realize the purposes of God (or gods)? To restore sinful people to a life of community with a loving and holy God? To create a utopia here on earth?

The answer will determine what/who you will live your life for.

What, exactly, is a “worldview”?

It is that set of basic beliefs and values to which people are committed, and which orients the way they live their lives. Worldviews are formed by and expressed in two ways:

1. The overlapping “stories” with which people identify (e.g. the stories of their nation, tribe, family and religion). These are the narratives which describe where they came from, where they think mankind is headed, their family roots, etc.
2. A set of foundational presuppositions about “the way things really are” which people hold either consciously or subconsciously and with greater or lesser consistence. Systematic theology is part of the attempt to create a coherent Christian identity and worldview.

Westerners’ presuppositions may have a large naturalistic, scientific element (“Big Bang”, evolution) while many other people groups have presuppositions in which the supernatural is central.

2. When did the church start thinking theologically?

In Ac. 2:42 we read of new converts continuing *“steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and the prayers.”*

Christian doctrine is about understanding and applying the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. As soon as the last apostles had died, however, the church was forced to think theologically on its own. Before then church leaders could write a letter and ask Peter or Paul or John for apostolic advice. By the end of the 1st century, when all these men were gone, the community had to start formulating its own answers based on the gospels and letters they’d received earlier from the apostles, and based on principles drawn from the Hebrew Bible, the TANAKH, which Christians came to call the Old Testament. (TANAKH is an acronym for Torah, Nevi’im, Ketuvim, i.e. the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings in Hebrew).

In short, the church had to start thinking theologically on its own after the passing away of the apostles, who bequeathed it with the divinely inspired theological framework within which it had to work.

3. What problems are associated with “doing” theology?

3.1. The Bible does not present its teaching in a systematic fashion.

Much of the Bible is told in either narrative, prophetic or poetic form. Some of it is wisdom literature. You need to be careful about lifting texts out of different contexts and from various types (genres) of literature and placing them next to each other in order to make a point. Although some New Testament epistles are fairly systematic expressions of theology on certain issues, they are still letters responding to specific situations experienced by local 1st century churches.

3.2. Theological education without transformation kills.

One of the dangers of studying theology is that the Bible is experienced as a book of doctrine, dogmas and abstract truths about God without actually encountering God himself in the process.

Without appropriating and personalizing truth it leads to a hardening of the heart and the development of doubts. You can become, in the words of Ray Stedman, "highly qualified to be utterly useless" for the kingdom of God.

2 Cor. 3:6, "*The letter kills but the Spirit gives life.*"

Jn. 7:17, "*If any man wills to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself.*"

Jn. 8:31-32, "*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (NIV)

3.3. There is no view – including theological perspectives – from nowhere.

This is one of the critical insights of postmodernism. Our worldview shapes our view of everything, including God. We approach theological questions from the standpoint of our own culture, questions, and personal issues.

For example, early church fathers like Origen, Athenagoras and Aquinas were hugely impacted by Greek (Neoplatonic, and in the case of Aquinas, Aristotelian) forms of thought. The neoplatonists thought the idea of God exhibiting emotions such as wrath or grief were inconsistent with his immutability (unchangeableness), and made him less than perfect. It made him look too much like the capricious gods of Greek mythology.

Their idea of God's *apatheia*, or impassibility (the idea that God cannot suffer or feel emotions) may have been consistent with stoic and (neo)Platonic thought, but was inconsistent with the Scriptures. They interpreted those passages which teach otherwise as anthropological (trying to express truths about God using human analogies) or as allegorical (as a symbol of something else), and in doing so lost an important biblical truth.

Luther tried to squeeze the Bible's teachings into his rediscovery of the truth that salvation is by faith alone, and not by works. As a result, he had little use for the book of James as he felt it undermined that fundamental truth.

Hyper-dispensationalism has the same phobia, and thus dispenses with large sections of the New Testament which do not fit that particular theological scheme.

Whether one likes it or not, however, the Bible clearly teaches that obedience, i.e., good works, is an important part of the Christian life!

Ps. 128:1, *“Blessed is everyone who fears Yahweh, who walks in his ways.”*

1 Cor. 5:15, *“He (Christ) died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again.”*

Jam. 2:26, *“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead.”*

John Calvin’s emphasis on election and the power and sovereignty of God led some of his followers to squeeze every aspect of their theology into that mould, leading to an extremely deterministic concept of God. In that respect their concept of God is not unlike that of, say, Islam: there is nothing people can do to appropriate salvation and that everything that takes place is God’s will. This leads to the blasphemous conclusion that God is the ultimate source of both all good and evil.²

Clearly, not everything that happens is the will of God! In fact, the Bible teaches that there are things which grieve God (Eph. 4:30) which he does not prevent from happening. (We will explore the reasons for this later).

Ps. 5:4, *“For you are not a God who has pleasure in wickedness. Evil cannot live with you.”*

2 Pet. 3:9, *“[God] is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”*

Jam. 1:13, *“Let no man say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one.”*

19th century theological conservatives like Charles Hodge thought religion could be approached scientifically, with the Bible being the object of their scientific investigations. But is the Bible really a systematic presentation of truth which any right-minded person will understand if it is presented to him/her logically? If so, should not apologetics and good teaching win the day every time with normal, rational people? Yet, clearly, it doesn’t...

By trying to preserve their idea of God, or by trying to formulate a rigorous, logically consistent system of theology, these people, some of whom were great theologians, ended up embracing certain teachings which were not, in fact, biblical.

3.4. The questions which people ask when they think theologically differ from one worldview and culture to the next.

This problem is closely related to the one above.

Western cultures are traditionally concerned with law: breaking the law, being guilty before the law, etc. The primary theological questions then

² We explore this subject in some depth in chapter XIV.

become, “How can I be justified, and thus be reconciled with God?” “How can a condemned sinner be reconciled with a holy God?” “How did Christ meet the demands of the law in my place?” And, of course, the Bible deals at length with this fundamentally important issue.

Animistic cultures and many folk religions (like folk Islam) are more taken up with the question of fear than of one’s legal standing before the law. They live in a world of evil spirits which witchdoctors seek to manipulate. Their primary theological questions might be, “Is the power of the Christian God sufficient to break the spell of the witch doctor?” or, “Is God’s Spirit greater than those of the jinn or evil spirits?”

Far Eastern and Middle Eastern cultures are driven more by the quest for honour. Certain cultural *faux pas* cause people to “lose face”, and they feel shamed. Being shamed is the worst thing that can befall a man in such cultures. Traditionally being shamed could lead to *hara kiri* in places like Japan, or honour killings in the Middle East. Their primary theological concerns might be, “How can I be restored to a position of honour?”

The Bible, of course, deals with all these issues – and a lot more! At this stage the point is that our worldview and culture determine how we approach theology.

3.5. The danger of deductive thinking

Often particular biblical teachings are pushed to logical extremes which go beyond anything the Bible teaches.

For example, in some Calvinist circles the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is logically extended to God’s omnicausality (i.e., that he is behind every evil and tragic event that takes place in the universe).³ This goes diametrically against the clear teachings of the Bible which state that God is not the source of evil – that he is, in fact, in the business of restraining evil.

Jam. 1:13, “*God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one.*”

2 Thes. 2:7, “*For the mystery of lawlessness already works. Only there is one who restrains now...*”

Or, to take another example, some in Arminian circles extend the Bible’s call to Christian obedience to undermine the clear Biblical teaching that those who are genuinely born again are eternally secure in Christ. This too goes diametrically against the clear teachings of the Bible.

³ Something can be part of God’s will of decree but opposed to his revealed will. Note that those who hold that all is included in God’s will of decree are not saying that it is not opposed to his revealed will. They recognize that there is a tension here.

Jn. 10:27-29, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”*

Rom. 8:38-39, *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

We must approach the subject of theology inductively (i.e., by digging into the Bible-as-a-whole and letting it shape our theology). This means we must take a step back when certain lines of seemingly logical thinking take us beyond the teachings of the Bible-as-a-whole.

1 Cor. 4:6, *“Learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” (NIV)*

3.6. Bad hermeneutics and exegesis

The danger that lurks in a theology book like this one is proof-texting. Texts have contexts. As the old adage puts it, *“a text out of context is a pretext”*.

It is not possible to over-emphasize the importance of the grammatico-historical principle of interpretation (that is, according to the laws of grammar and the facts of history; i.e., the simplest, most direct, literal sense of a passage, the way ordinary people would ordinarily understand it), as well as the importance of taking into account each particular Bible book’s literary genre. The historical context matters greatly but, thankfully, much of that is provided by the historical books of the Bible itself. Let the Bible interpret the Bible! OT quotes in the NT must be interpreted in the light of their OT context. *Sola Scriptura* (the Bible alone) is one of the basic tenets of the Protestant Reformation.

All that to say that one can easily string together carefully selected texts pulled out of context to make a point, while disregarding references which contradict one’s favoured theological position.

It is impossible in a work like this, which seeks to create a synthesis of the Bible’s teachings, not to string verses together. It is up to the reader to determine whether the texts quoted actually support the thesis set forth, and whether each subject is presented in a biblically balanced manner.

3.7. The denominational bias

It is all too easy to interpret whatever we read in the Bible through the lens of our own church tradition's biases and emphases. One's emotional tie with the theological tradition of the denomination in which one was raised inevitably shapes one's theological predilections. Christ specifically warned the theologians of his day of this danger.

Mat. 15:6, "*You have made the commandment of God void because of your tradition. You hypocrites!*"

Closely tied to this is the danger of giving more credence to a church father, reformer or other figure in church history than to the scriptures themselves. Their teachings too must be subjected to the touchstone of the scriptures, and not the other way around!

4. **Why is thinking theologically important for the Christian when there are all these substantial problems associated with it?**

4.1. Genuine Christian theology seeks to create a bible-based framework of thinking which helps the believer know God better

Systematic theology seeks to distill from the Bible the truths we need to know and live by. In an age when absolutes are under attack, there is great need for knowing and maintaining sound doctrine, i.e., the "*the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints*" (Jude 3).

There is such a thing as "right" and "wrong" teaching, even such a thing as "*doctrines of demons*" (1 Tim. 4:1). We need to understand the differences because knowing the truth about God matters greatly! What you believe impacts your life. You cannot faithfully serve God if you don't have clear and firm ideas about his nature, character and will. This was something Christians in the past understood very well: there were doctrines and teachings about God for which people were willing to die in the past. This is still the case in certain parts of the world.

Rom. 10:3, "*Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness*".

"Disregard the study of God and you condemn yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded as it were, and with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you". **J.I. Packer**, *Knowing God*, ch. 1.

4.2. Theology helps explain what happened to you at conversion

When you were converted you may have had a glorious experience of God in Jesus Christ. You may have had a sense of sins forgiven, peace, hope, and victory over some besetting sin or dependency issue.

Theology helps explain what happened to you when you became a Christian. It enables you to explain in propositional terms what actually took place when you met God in Jesus Christ, and what the ongoing and future consequences of that meeting are. In doing so it provides the basic premises on which the Christian worldview is based.

Apologetics seeks to answer the question of how Christianity is true while systematic theology presents the tenets of Christianity in propositional terms.

4.3. Missions and evangelism is teaching “the whole counsel of God” (Ac. 20:27) and “making disciples” (Mat. 28:-18-19)

Missionary work is more than sharing your spiritual experience. Many people believe that sharing their experience of God in Jesus Christ (i.e. giving their testimony) combined with loving and serving people in some way and drawing together groups of people that sing, pray and “do bible study” together is what evangelical missionary work is all about. In fact, it is much more than that. It is teaching foundational truths which re-orientate people’s lives around God and his revelation of Jesus Christ in the Bible.

People of other religious traditions also have transformational experiences. In time you will meet others who have also had a glorious spiritual experience which transformed their lives and gave them a new identity. However, they may think that your set of beliefs about Jesus are a pack of lies from the devil! Who is right? I know of former missionaries who were so shaken when they befriended wonderfully spiritual people of other faiths that their own evangelical spirituality seemed superficial – and they ended up leaving the Christian faith.

All that to say that missionary work is not just preaching a core evangelistic and/or emotionally charged message. It is teaching the whole spectrum of Biblical truth. Theology seeks to spell that out in clear, comprehensive, propositional terms.

Christianity is a teaching religion. Jesus was both a teacher and a preacher.

Mk. 1:21, 38 *“Straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught... And he (Jesus) said unto them, “Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for to this end came I forth.”*

See also Mk. 1:27; Mat. 26:18.

The first community of believers appointed deacons to enable the apostles to focus on the ministries of prayer and teaching.

Ac. 6:2-4, "It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God, and serve tables. Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will continue stedfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word."

Paul emphasized the importance of good teaching.

1 Cor. 14:19, "In the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue."

Sound teaching involves leading people towards a Christian worldview by answering the basic questions which, consciously or not, form people's perceptions of reality.

4.4. Theology defines the different perspectives genuine Christians have on their shared Christian worldview

This is a particularly important matter for missionaries working in interdenominational agencies. Christian fellowship is based on shared Christian truth. However, even when people basically share the fundamentals of a particular worldview, they have different "takes" on it. For instance, a Christian might state that the purpose of life is to seek the kingdom of God, or to love, obey and enjoy him, or to fulfil his will, or to be sensitive to his Spirit. Each of these perspectives leads to alternative perspectives of the Christian worldview. Each is born from a different theological emphasis arising from the "point of view" from which the person begins theologizing.

The study of theology should help to define what really matters: what doctrines are "tests of fellowship", what teachings are worth dying for? What are the essential, fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith and which ones are of secondary importance? Who can the Christian work with in what kinds of Christian ministry? For example, would you campaign against abortion with a Christian who had a different view on baptism? Would you try to plant a church with them? What issues should a Christian be willing to break fellowship over?

Getting this wrong leads to unnecessary conflicts on the one hand (as, for example, the great reformers Calvin, Luther and Zwingli breaking Protestantism's unity over different views of the Lord's Supper) and, on the

other hand, can lead to an all-embracing ecumenism which espouses unity at the expense of truth, as seen, for example, in the World Council of Churches.

So: *“If you put the brethren in mind of these things, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished in the words of the faith, and of the good doctrine which you have followed until now”* (1 Tim. 4:6).

And: *“Take heed to yourself, and to your teaching. Continue in these things; for in doing this you shall save both yourself and them that hear you.”* (1Tim. 4:16).

The creation of a statement of faith is when a particular group of believers try to spell out what they hold to be the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. This is doing systematic theology.

5. What are the different approaches to theology?

5.1. Biblical Theology

The study of the teachings of the individual authors and books of the Bible, and the place this teaching has in the historical development of the topic.

5.2. Systematic Theology

Any study that answers the question, “What does the Bible-as-a-whole teach about a given topic?” It collects all of the Bible’s teachings on a particular subject and tries to create a synthesis of those teachings. That synthesis is then perceived as God’s truth about that particular matter.

5.3. Historical Theology

The study of how Christians in the course of history have developed their understanding on various theological topics.

5.4. Narrative theology

The study of how the development of the overarching biblical story (narrative) shapes and helps define the church’s teachings and praxis. (Think of it as looking at the Biblical story as a “play” with different scenes which all come together in the end).

5.5. Liberal Theology (or “theological liberalism”)

Theology based on a naturalistic view of reality. It rejects the idea of miracles, denies the divine origin of the Bible and, as a result, tends to doubt the truthfulness of biblical history and of many Christian doctrines.

5.6. Neo-orthodox Theology

Typically holds that the historicity of the Bible is not important. The important thing is that God uses the Bible to speak to people. It is like his voice box. This idea is closely associated with Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.

Karl Barth held that Scripture is not revelation in and of itself, but rather becomes revelation when the Holy Spirit uses it to make Christ known. In other words, God causes it to be his Word to the extent that he uses it to be his Word when he speaks through it.

5.7. Protest Theologies

Liberation, Black and Feminist theologies define themselves by specific socio-economic contexts. They typically try to force the Biblical teachings to fit a particular ideological bent.

5.8. Process Theology

A theology which holds that change is the one, absolute norm in the universe, and thus God is also constantly changing as he responds to changing circumstances. Because God is fully involved with his creation, he is affected by it, and evolves in response to what happens in it.

The Bible strongly rejects the idea of an evolving, changing God:

Isa. 46:10, *"I declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done. I say: My counsel will stand, and I will do all that I please."*

Jam. 1:17, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, nor turning shadow."*

Unlike other academic disciplines, theology should not primarily be about expanding knowledge but about better understanding the "old bible story" and applying it effectively to one's self and the society in which one finds one's self: *"Thus says Jehovah, Stand you in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls"* (Jer. 6:16).

6. **What distinguishes traditional Protestant theology from Roman Catholic theology?**

According to the Reformers of the 16th century, five beliefs distinguished Protestantism from Roman Catholicism (though in fact Roman Catholics are not likely to reject the last one, and possibly two. How they interpret "in Christ alone" differs from classic Protestantism).

They are known as the five “solas” (sola = alone).

Sola scriptura = by Scripture alone

Sola fide = by faith alone

Sola gratia = by grace alone

Solus Christus = in Christ alone

Soli Deo gloria = glory to God alone

7. What is Evangelical Theology?⁴

Evangelical theology includes a range of outlooks such as Reformed, Arminian, Pentecostal and Charismatic. For example, the theologians Wayne Grudem, Millard Erickson, Roger Olson, Gordon Fee, Stanley Horton, and Michael Horton all identify as evangelical. Even though they represent a wide range of views and opinions, they would undoubtedly recognize the others as brothers in Christ with whom they could share deep Christian fellowship.

The following five points represent a workable summary of historic Evangelical beliefs:

7.1. Biblically-grounded

The God who exists has revealed objective universal and eternal truths to mankind. These were recorded in the Old and New Testaments in linguistic and cultural forms designed to make God’s message understandable.

7.2. Christ-centred

The second person of the Trinity became a human being in the historical man Jesus of Nazareth. He was God’s revelation of himself to humanity.

John 14:8-9, “Jesus said unto him, Have I been so long with you, and do you not know me, Philip? He that has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, Show us the Father? Believe you not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?”

7.3. Cross-focused

The good news (gospel) of God’s revelation in Christ is most evident in the event of his crucifixion, an event which reconciled God’s attributes of justice and mercy, and enabled him to provide atonement for the sins of people from every race and ethnic group.

⁴ Note that world “evangelical” in theology is different from similar words in German and Dutch which attach to certain traditional church denominations, but which may not subscribe to evangelical teachings as described in theological discourse today.

7.4. Conversion-imperative

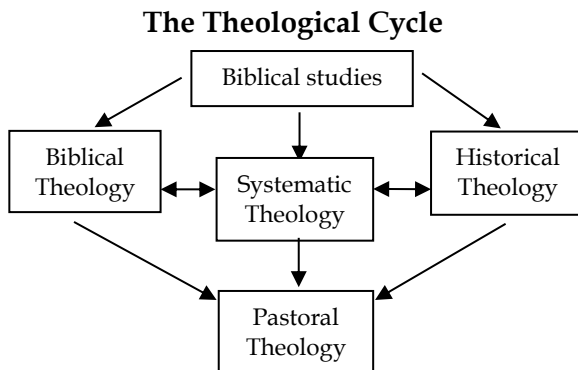
People must personally appropriate by repentance and faith the good news of God’s eternal gospel. In other words, there must be a discernible reorientation of the sinner’s mind and heart towards God.

7.5. Service-consequence

Gospel truth must be demonstrated in evangelism and Christian service.⁵

8. How do different approaches to theology relate to each other?

Through a process of theological interaction the evangelical theologian seeks to create a synthesis of the Bible’s teaching on a particular subject, and then apply that to individual believers and to the church as a whole.



This process makes “doing” evangelical theology quite different from “doing” liberal theology.

The purpose of evangelical theology is pastoral. It seeks to discover God’s truth as it is revealed in the Bible, the way it has been interpreted in the past, and seeks to apply that to the body of believers today. It is (or should be) ultimately God-honoring and local-church focused.

The church and the pastoral element in the study of liberal theology is usually secondary. It typically seeks to push the academic pursuit of theology to new frontiers as well as adapt it to (post)modernity.

⁵ For expanded descriptions of Evangelical Theology see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain; A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1989 4-8. Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995).

9. Can anyone be unbiased in their theological work?

No. We have already seen that there is no view from nowhere, and that our personal perspectives color the way we think theologically.

That begs the question: what is the perspective that enables one to think theologically in biblical terms? After all, the Bible teaches that as a result of the natural and judicial impact of sin, man's ability to think rightly about God is impaired.

9.1. It is almost impossible to think rightly about one's enemy.

People are in a position of enmity with God. Thus, whether they recognize or acknowledge it or not, people are under his disfavor because his holy nature causes him to respond negatively to sin. Sin makes him angry and causes people to fall out of favor with him. Wrath is God's response to sin and alienates man from him. The Bible clearly affirms that in their natural state people are at enmity with God. They are under his righteous judgment.

Jn. 3:36, "One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

Rom. 1:18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." See also Rom. 2:5; 9:22.

Rom. 8:7, "The mind of the flesh is hostile towards God."

See also Col. 1:21.

9.2. The Bible describes fallen people as "spiritually dead"

This means that no one, of their own accord, seeks God rightly.

Rom 3:11, "There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks after God".

Eph. 2:1, "You were made alive when you were dead in transgressions and sins."

Col. 2:13, "You were dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh."

This means, at the very least, that people's sensitivity to spiritual truth and their ability to understand and respond to the things of God is very distorted.

They may, for instance, avoid thinking deeply about certain realities (like death), deny the sinfulness of certain acts altogether, and reclassify other sinful acts as ignorance or social maladjustment or mental sickness, so as to deny personal responsibility. In short, the fact that people prefer to believe

things to be other than they are means they cannot think theologically in the right way. Their presuppositions are wrong.

Jer. 17:9, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?”*

1 Cor. 1:20, *“Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”*

In other words, a non-biblical worldview cannot provide the right basis for doing theology.

A right approach to theology can only be done from the perspective of a biblical worldview. And a biblical worldview can only be found in the Bible!

It is not that the Christian worldview is particularly difficult to understand—any right-minded person can grasp the basic contours of the Bible’s worldview. However it takes grace to accept it as true and to allow it to re-form your identity.

10. So... to be able to think aright theologically you need a biblical worldview, but to get a biblical worldview you need to think in theological terms... Isn’t this circular reasoning?

Yes. But—and this may come as a surprise—a certain type of circular reasoning exists in almost all thought on foundational issues.

Circularity is only bad if you go around and around in a circle without making any progress. What we are talking about is the circularity of a spiral boring ever deeper. By examining the biblical way of looking at things and comparing it critically with the way you personally look at them you begin a process which, if you allow it, will enable you to develop a biblical worldview and that, in turn, enables you to think and respond more accurately to theological matters (i.e., the things of God). This becomes part of a lifelong process called sanctification.

11. What, in a nutshell, is the Biblical worldview we should “inhabit” if we are to approach theology from the right perspective?

Put another way, what is the biblical “story” and what are the Bible’s foundational presuppositions with which we must identify if we are to approach theology from a Biblical perspective?

The Biblical worldview is told in both story, or narrative form, as well as in propositional statements. The reason is that people’s identities are formed by a combination of both and, in large part, the Christian faith is about people forming

a new identity. Furthermore no single literary form is sufficient to communicate the many aspects of divine truth.

Here, then, is the basic outline of the biblical worldview we must embrace before we can think Christianly about theology (or anything else for that matter). Each of these concepts will be expanded and given their biblical basis later.

11.1. The Triune and relational concept of God

The biblical concept of God is of a spiritual union of three personal beings sharing the same divine essence, and whose every characteristic (love, mercy, justice, anger, etc.) exists in its ultimate form in each of them. This means that he not only exists, he is relational in his very essence, and faithful to (and thus limited by) his character and his word. This, in turn, means that God is not capricious.

11.2. The existence of good and evil spiritual realms

Sometime before the creation of the physical universe God created a spiritual realm, heaven, which he filled with angelic beings so constituted that they have the ability to exist forever after.

These angelic beings were created flawless, but with the potential to become flawed because God granted them free will. This involved a self-limitation on God's part, for in so doing he created the possibility of multiple wills to arise, including wills that might oppose his own.

The reason God took this route was because the basis of genuine love consists of a freely made choice. And one of God's characteristics is a deep and abiding love: God was not interested in creating robots simply programmed to do his will. He desires to love and be loved freely and unconditionally.

11.4. A fall into sin by the free agents God had created.

Many of these angelic beings continued to love their creator and delighted in doing his bidding and in worshiping him unceasingly. Sometime in ages past, however, a number of these beings exercised their free will in rebellion against God. Because of the character of God and the way he constituted the universe, once a created being willfully expresses their opposition to him, God withdraws his grace from that being. That being becomes "graceless" and condemned to an eternal existence of being at enmity with their creator. There is no evidence that these fallen angels were granted the grace to repent, nor was the way of salvation created for them. That is a privilege God reserved for mankind.

Now multiple wills operate in the universe: God's will, those heavenly beings who subjected themselves to it, and those who had set themselves up in opposition to God under their leader, Satan.

- 11.5. God then created a new, physical world and appointed altogether new creatures, the human pair, to rule over it as his vassal.

This human pair was also granted a free will—which, in time they also exercised in opposition to God. In so doing they aligned themselves with the rebellious heavenly beings at enmity with God. They became both self-oriented and receptive to the lies of their new master, Satan. Their offspring was created in the image of their parents: alienated from their Creator and subjected to death and divine judgment.

The introduction of sin into the physical universe had a huge impact. Originally created for humans to rule and enjoy, it, like them, became subject to death and decay. It fell under Satan's rule.

- 11.6. Instead of destroying this world, which was now under his condemnation, aligned with Satan and subject to death, God sovereignly implemented a plan of redemption.

This plan would lead, step by step, to the restoration of his relationship with a great multitude of human beings as well as to the eventual restoration of the physical universe. He chose to do this without violating his character, nor that of the beings he had created. This means that God had to act first—mankind was in no state to do so—yet he had to act within the limits of his altogether holy and righteous character.

- 11.7. Each person of the Triune God took upon himself certain responsibilities to effect this salvation.

The second person of the Trinity willingly gave up his glory to become a man—without giving up his divinity. As a perfect man, but of infinite personal worth by virtue of his divinity, he could, as a penal (i.e. legally acceptable) substitute, atone for mankind's sins by absorbing the demands of God's just and holy wrath in his person, so that God's holy love could be directed towards sinners. God the Father then raised him from the dead, and gave him a redeemed people. The Holy Spirit applied the work of salvation to sinners by convicting them of sin and by enabling them to understand, accept and walk in the way of salvation.

- 11.8. As a result of that reconciliation an alternative kingdom is emerging from within Satan's realm.

That alternative kingdom will spread across the earth in the face of great opposition until Jesus Christ returns in person to reconstitute the universe, at which time only the divine will is operative. Every knee will bow to him.

Rom. 14:11, *“As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘to me every knee will bow’.*”

11.9. Human beings derive a sense of purpose and meaning by living in the light of eternity.

Upon Christ’s second coming every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord. Those who accepted him as their Lord and Savior will do so with great rejoicing, others against their wills. True believers will then be ushered into his presence and receive the rewards of their labours, and those who did not will fall under his righteous judgement.

If you accept these fundamentals everything else falls into place.

12. How important is historical theology (i.e. the way the church formulated its teachings in the past) to theology today?

Historical theology is the story of the development of Christian thought. It includes such topics as the development of the doctrines of the Trinity and the nature of Christ, the recognition of the NT canon (books of the New Testament) during the first 4 centuries of Christian history, different views on God’s sovereignty and human will from Augustine in the fourth century to the present Calvinist/Arminian debates, different interpretation on the nature of the gospel between Roman Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation period, and, more recently, on the nature of inspiration of the Bible and the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Historical theology tells how God ongoingly leads his church into (or back to) the truths about himself and the salvation he effected in Jesus Christ.

Historical theology is also the story of the heroes who stood for particular biblical truths in the course of church history, sometimes almost alone in the face of widespread heresy (non-biblical teachings)--men like Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, as well as Athanasius, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Balthasar Hubmaier, and numerous other heroes of the faith.

Historical theology is also the story of how the church attempted to give an account for the hope within it (1 Pet. 3:15) in different cultural milieus.

Sadly, many Christians are woefully ignorant of their own rich theological heritage, something which has negatively impacted their theological understanding and practice.

II

The Existence of God

“He who comes to God must believe that he exists, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him.” (Heb. 11:6)



1. Does God exist?

1.1. The Bible assumes God’s existence.

The Bible does not attempt to prove God’s existence. In fact, to deny the existence of God is to be thought a fool and, worse, is seen as suppressing the evidence that God has clearly given in both nature and history.

Gen. 1:1 assumes God’s existence: *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”*

Psalm 14:1, *“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt. They have done abominable deeds. There is no one who does good.”*

Rom. 1:19-20, *“That which is known of God is revealed in them, for God revealed it to them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse.”*

This passage should encourage us when we bring the Gospel to people who claim to be atheists. It declares that somewhere, deep down, people recognize that there is a God, even if they suppress it.

You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you. <p style="text-align: right;">Augustine (354-430)</p>
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1.2. Ancient Israel thought in terms of God “hiding himself” when things in the world made no sense to them, not in terms of his non-existence.

Psa. 13:1, *“How long, Yahweh? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?”* See also Psa. 27:9,

Psa. 44:24, *“Why do you hide your face, and forget our affliction and our oppression?”*

See also Psa. 55:1; 69:17; 88:14; 89:46; 143:7.

Obviously, the idea of God hiding himself when seemingly irrational events befall us leads to an entirely different way of dealing with life than imagining that a personal God does not so much as exist!

1.3. The Bible presents creation as one of the great acts of God.

Rev. 4:11, *“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honor, and the power, for you created all things, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!”*

Isa. 40:27-28, *“Haven’t you known? Haven’t you heard? The everlasting God, Yahweh, The Creator of the ends of the earth, does not faint. He is not weary. His understanding is unsearchable.”*

1.4. Assumed theism v. assumed atheism

The Christian worldview is at variance with public assumptions in much of western society, where the forming of public opinion tends to be controlled by those holding either atheistic or agnostic presuppositions. For example, in education evolution is taught almost to the exclusion of creationism. The media often brands Christian/theistic views as intolerant—an old Marxist tactic: “Always accuse the enemy of what you yourself are doing.”

Aggressive neo-atheists built on the legacy of older western intellectuals, like Bertrand Russell (*Why I am Not a Christian*). These people include Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Victor J. Stenger, Lawrence M. Krauss, A. C. Grayling, Stephen Hawking, etc. Published in October 2006, *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins sold millions of copies.

These neo-atheists hold that natural science is capable of explaining all observable phenomena in the universe. Hence it is not necessary to introduce a concept of God to understand reality.

As a result people—even those who grow up in Christian homes—are surrounded by an assumed atheism. On a typical day Western Christians are exposed to many more influences of unbelief than of belief.

When people stop believing in God, it is assumed that they believe in nothing. But it is far worse than that, because then they will believe anything.

G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

2. Can the existence of God be proved?

Philosophers and theologians have developed various arguments which seek to prove the existence of God.

Before looking at them, however, let's take a brief look at the nature of doubt.

2.1. A few thoughts about the nature of doubt

There are essentially three types of doubting unbelievers in the Western, secular context:

a. Those who embrace doubt because it stills their consciences

Whenever these people's consciences disturb them they take refuge in doubt. By nurturing their doubt these people feel free to continue living as they want. These people often love debating with religious people, because even if they cannot convince their opponent, they feel more secure in their doubts if they manage to stump their Christian interlocuters. Arguing with people like this is of little use.

b. Those who are always "weighing up the evidence" but never come to a conclusion

These people seek 100% certainty before committing themselves. There is no such thing as 100% certainty outside the realm of mathematics. Certainty grows relationally and existentially. The root problem of this type of doubt is a lack of certain critical experiences. See 2.2.

c. Those who long for rest of mind and soul, and will do what it takes to get that

These are the "distressed doubters". For them there is hope.

2.2. Christ's approach to doubters is an argument based on experience

Christ's approach to doubters was "Try me and then decide!" According to Jesus, certainty comes with obedience.

Jn. 7:17, "If anyone desires to do his [i.e. God's] will, he will know about the teaching, whether it is from God, or if I am speaking from myself."

If someone had told me that I could follow a service in my home church while serving as a new missionary in the Syrian desert I would not have believed it. However, when, decades later, I experienced it online the scepticism disappeared. Instead of protesting the mind re-classifies the new experience within its new framework of understanding--even if it doesn't fully grasp the underlying principles involved. The same thing is true with respect to one's perception of Christ after experiencing him.

In other words, Christian assurance is ultimately based on experience, not merely on academic knowledge or critical thinking. One of the root problems of doubt is a lack of certain critical experiences.

2.3. The philosophical arguments

Some of these have a long history, all the way back to Aristotle. Their Christian version dates back to Aquinas, part of whose life-work consisted of trying to integrate Aristotle's philosophy with Christian theology.

a. God as the Unmoved Mover

Everything that moves must have a mover. This means there must have been a first mover, which must have been God. God is moved by no other.

b. Various versions of the Cosmological Argument: God as the First Cause

There must be a first cause (or an "uncaused cause") to the universe.

The reason for the existence of a tree, or a chair, or a human being is not in them but outside of them. To explain their contingent existence there must be a reality that necessarily exists, whose reason for existence is within itself.

Something caused the universe to exist, and this self-existent first cause is what we call God.

Another way of stating it is as follows: every finite being has a cause. A causal loop cannot exist and a causal chain cannot be of infinite length, so a first cause (i.e. not an effect) must exist.

Or it can be put this way: the existence of the universe requires an explanation (this is known as the Principle of Sufficient Reason), and the creation of the universe by a first cause, generally assumed to be God, is that explanation.

The version as stated by the Arabic philosopher Al-Ghazali is known as the Kalam Cosmological argument. It was restated in contemporary philosophical terms and developed by William Lane Craig:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore the universe had a cause.

Rev. 4:11, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honor, and the power, for you created all things, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!"

c. The Moral Argument: God is the standard of all virtues⁶

Man has moral consciousness. He possesses a persistent voice which tells him what he ought to do. He has a sense of right from wrong.

People who argue for morality (as in “how would you like it if someone did that to you”), are appealing to a standard of behaviour which they expect the other person to recognize, to know about. The Apostle Paul makes use of this argument:

Rom. 2:1, 14-15, *“Therefore you are without excuse, O man, whoever you are who judge. For in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself. For you who judge practice the same things... when Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying with them, and their thoughts among themselves accusing or else excusing them...”*

“Whenever you find a man who says he does not believe in real right or wrong, you will find the same man going back on this a moment later. He may break his promise to you, but if you try breaking one to him he will be complaining, ‘it’s not fair’”¹

The moral argument holds that the perfect and objective standard of people’s innate sense of right and wrong is God.

As far as the German philosopher Immanuel Kant was concerned, this argument and the cosmological argument are the only serious ones proving God’s existence.

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you” (Mat. 7:12 NIV).

Try doing this for a specific period of time—you will soon revert to your default position of living for your own interests or those of your family, friends, etc. The experience will teach you that: (1) You live primarily for yourself. In other words, you are evil in this sense. Now you don’t think superficially about human nature anymore. (2) You are now in a position to see Jesus Christ in a new light. Here was someone who did to others as he would have them do to him for his entire life in a way that seemed entirely natural. He never slipped up. The truly miraculous, truly supernatural aspect of Jesus is his utter goodness. You have now reached the conclusion that his nature is fundamentally different from yours. (3) At this point your scepticism is doomed. Once you begin to believe one supernatural fact about Jesus Christ, the rest falls into place--and your intellectual difficulties will gradually dissolve.

Argument from *Why I am a Christian* by **O. Hallesby**

⁶ C.S. Lewis is good on this subject in *Mere Christianity*.

“Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.” **Inscription on Immanuel Kant’s gravestone, Königsberg.**

d. Teleological and intelligent design arguments

Everything that exists is ordered to an end or goal, a *telos*. There is design, order, harmony and a sense of purpose in the universe. The same way a watch was created for a specific purpose (teleological), and that its complexity implies the existence of an intelligent maker, so one may infer from the universe, given its complexity, that it was created for a purpose by a divine creator.

The intelligent design argument resonates with the notion of the fine-tuned universe. If the design of the universe were only slightly altered life would become impossible. For more on this see Hugh Ross’ book *Why the Universe is the Way It Is*.

Rom. 1:20, “*For His (i.e. God’s) invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.*”

When we behold the heavens, when we contemplate the celestial bodies, can we fail of conviction? Must we not acknowledge that there is a divinity, a perfect being, a ruling intelligence which governs, a God who is everywhere and directs all by his power? Anybody who doubts this may as well deny there is a sun that lights us.

Cicero (1st century B.C.)

e. Ontological Argument: a perfect being must exist

The ontological argument was first proposed by Anselm (1033-1109) in 1078. He defined God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived". He then argued that if man can conceive of a being of which no greater being can be conceived, then that being must exist. Because if that being did not exist that being would be less of a perfect being than can be conceived. In other words, a perfect being could not just exist in the mind if it were perfect. If the greatest possible being exists in the mind, it must also exist in reality.

“There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and you are this being, O Lord, our God. So truly, therefore, do you exist... that you cannot be conceived not to exist: and rightly. For, if a mind could conceive of a being better than you, the creature would rise above the Creator; and this is most absurd.”

Anselm. Quoted by John Hick in *Philosophy of Religion*, 1968, pg. 171-172.

2.4. Arguments from the observation of human life

Man is greater than the sum total of his body parts. In other words, there is a spiritual (non-physical) reality from which our spiritual dimensions are derived.

Man is a self-conscious being. He is aware of himself and his activities. He has self-determination and purposeful goals. He can set aside his biological impulses to achieve something else. It is, in fact, impossible to understand personhood only on the basis of biology and physics. The mind is more than a non-physical by-product of the processes of the physical body.

Thus human conscience, consciousness, emotion, and religiosity all lead to the conclusion that there must be a God who implanted in man the basic ingredients needed to relate to him, their creator.

“If I find in myself desires which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” **C.S. Lewis**, *Mere Christianity*

“We have still stronger evidence ... that a sense of Deity is naturally engraven on the human heart in the fact that ... when at their ease, they can jest about God, and talk in disparagement of his power; but should despair overtake them, it will stimulate them to seek him.” **Calvin**, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chapter 4, Section 4)

2.5. Pascal’s Wager

In his book *Pensées* (1658) the French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal argued that Christianity was rational in the sense that if the agnostic chooses to believe he loses little if, in the end, Christianity proves to be false. If, on the other hand, Christianity proves to be true and the agnostic opts not to believe, then he has everything to lose. Thus believing makes better sense than not believing.

3. **What is the worth of these apologetic arguments?**

3.1. They are part of general revelation

They can provoke people to think about God's existence—something which is rarely necessary outside the West—as well as strengthen the faith of those who already believe in God’s existence.

However, different people may be influenced by different arguments according to their personal situation. A twenty-something westerner may be

influenced by someone's personal testimony, while a Muslim may reconsider his religion because of a dream.

Taken together they point to the strong possibility of the existence of a supreme, all-powerful, self-sufficient, supremely intelligent and wise Creator who is actively involved in this world.

3.2. They are not sufficient to convince people that the God who revealed himself in the Bible and in Jesus Christ exists

Although these arguments can be a step toward faith in the God of the Bible, they do not prove that the God as described in the Bible exists. These arguments are not sufficient to bring a person to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Muslims accept these arguments as well, but their concept of God is radically different from the triune God of Christianity.

Certain early modern western philosophers (notably Immanuel Kant) spent a lot of time trying to undermine most of these arguments.

3.3. A view of God based on creation/general revelation alone is deficient

If religion were based on general revelation alone we would conclude⁷:

- a. That God normally acts alone in solitary, divine splendour, as he must have done when he made the world out of nothing;
- b. That God achieves in an instance whatever he decides, and is best known for his omnipotence;
- c. That God acts within a perfect situation, since he cannot produce anything unworthy of himself. After all, even the Genesis account states repeatedly, "*And God saw that it was good...*"
- d. That all the details of God's creative actions in the universe can be scientifically measured and understood;
- e. That for the above-mentioned reasons, God's acts were unique and will not be replicated in the future.

In fact, the rest of the Bible shows us:

- a. That God often works through human networks of politics, economics, and social customs. The setting of his ongoing action is not "nothingness" but the realities of human life.
- b. That God seeks to impress people less with his power as with his covenant mercy and sovereign grace towards sinful human beings;

⁷ Drawn from Donald Senior, Carrol Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Missions*. Orbis Books, New York. 1995.

- c. That God's actions cannot be measured or understood scientifically, because no one can determine the height and depth of his grace, love and mercy (Isa. 55:6-11; Eph. 3:18).
- d. That certain of God's acts are repeated over and over again – every time he saves a person from the consequences of their sin.

These are what is known as the *mirabilia dei*: God's great redemptive acts; his mighty works of redemption.

III

Revelation and the Knowledge of God

“He said to me, ‘Son of Man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you. The Spirit entered into me when he spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard him who spoke to me.’” (Ezek. 2:1-2)



1. What do Christians mean when they say they know God?

Many philosophies and religions deny that it is possible to know God.

Jesus Christ, however, describes the privilege of being a Christian as follows: *“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”* (John 17:3).

This presumes that it is possible for sinful and limited creatures to know something about the holy, infinite and transcendent God. It means that we can know what is true about him, even if it does not mean that we can know all there is to know about him.

We can know God because he acts consistently with his character. He is knowable because he is “limited” by his character (i.e., his holiness, righteousness, etc.), his word (i.e. his promises and covenants) and the incarnate word (i.e., as he revealed Himself to be in Jesus Christ). This idea, which is at the heart of the Judeo-Christian concept of God, is foreign to every other religious and philosophical tradition. As a result we can rest assured that he will act in accordance with his character and carry out his promises. He can be trusted to act within the framework of who he is.

Knowledge of God is knowledge of facts about him, but is not limited to that. It is also possible to know him in terms of a personal relationship.

True knowledge of God can only be obtained through revelation.

2. What is revelation?

Revelation means unveiling something that is hidden so that it may be known for what it is. The Hebrew verb "to reveal" is *galah*. The most common NT Greek word

is *apokalyppto*. Both terms express the idea of uncovering something which was concealed or hidden. It is the idea of “lifting the veil which covers something”.

Another Greek term commonly used is *phaneroô* which conveys the idea of making manifest, revealing, making plain, making clear, or showing. (This is a root term for the compound word theophany, which means “manifestation of God”.)

In theology the concept of revelation are the acts and words by which God makes himself known to his creatures. He partly lifts the veil which prevents people from knowing him.

3. Why do we need revelation?

Two things prevent us from knowing God as he really is:

3.1. God’s own holiness and transcendence

The Bible assumes that God must choose to disclose or reveal himself to mankind before we can know him because he is not accessible to us, his creatures. God’s eternity, his spiritual nature, and his absolute perfection are all beyond our limited, finite minds.

Isa. 55:9, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

1 Tim. 6:15-16, “[God] the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and eternal power.”

3.2. Because of our finiteness and sinfulness

The need for revelation became even more acute after the Fall. Man’s relationship with God was broken, and ever since mankind has lived in a state of spiritual blindness.

1 Cor. 2:14, “Now the natural man does not receive the things of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Eph. 2:1, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... we were dead through our trespasses...”

If God is to be known in any meaningful way it has to be by self-revelation on his part, not by speculation on ours. In spite of the fact that God is holy and transcendent, and we finite and sinful, he still desires relationship with mankind!

Jn. 14:23, “Jesus answered him, ‘If a man loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him.’”

4. What is general revelation?

General revelation is God revealing (manifesting) himself through (1) nature, (2) the moral sense. That is, the fact that certain moral standards are almost universally accepted as being right and wrong (like murder, stealing, adultery, etc.). Such a moral conscience points to someone who is the source of values, as well as to a hereafter, a judgment, where what we have done in the here-and-now will matter. (3) The universality of the religious experience also suggests a past, lost knowledge of God. In all cultures, at all times in history, and in all places, people have believed in a higher reality than one's self. You have to teach a child not to believe in God.

These things are called general revelation because it is for all persons at all times, and is general in its content. It points to the existence of God, but does not specify God's attributes and plans for humanity.

Psa. 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God. The expanse shows his handiwork."

Psa. 8:1, 4-5, "Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens!... When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained; what is man, that you think of him? What is the son of man, that you care for him? For you have made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor."

5. How useful is general revelation?

5.1. Its value

There is a universal knowledge of some truth about God. Everyone has some knowledge of God, though this knowledge may be suppressed to the point where one is no longer aware of it.

Rom. 1:19ff, "That which is known of God is revealed in them, for God revealed it to them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse."

5.2. Its inadequacy

Because of the nature of man, general revelation is not enough to enable people to enter into a redemptive relationship with God.

1 Cor. 1:21, "For seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe."

In *The Library of Babel* J. Borges portrays the universe as a huge library. The hero is thrilled to access it for the solution to every problem is somewhere on those shelves. But the more he learns the more he despairs. He needs a book that will makes sense of all the others or, better still, a man “analogous to God” who can explain it all. The man dies in despair because he never finds the book or meets the person who can help him make sense of it all.

However, there is a book as well as a man “analogous to God” who can explain it all – and he is not hidden away on some dusty shelf!

6. What is special revelation and why is it needed?

“Special revelation is God’s manifestation of himself to particular persons at definite times and places, thereby enabling people to enter into a redemptive relationship with himself.”⁸

In special revelation God goes beyond generalities. He supplies specific and certain knowledge about himself, not to satisfy our curiosity but in order that we may come to know him personally.

The purpose of special revelation is to rebuild the relationship between fallen, spiritually blind people and their Creator.

Without special revelation people will do whatever is right in their own eyes.

Prov. 29:18, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint.”

7. What is the nature of special revelation? What is it like?

7.1. It is personal

We see this in several ways. For example, God revealed his name (which indicates personality) to Moses in Exodus 3. He entered into personal covenants with particular people, such as the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, David, with the church as the new covenant community, etc.

The Biblical narrative is the story of a personal God making personal contact with a particular people. There is very little in the Bible which is not concerned with God’s redemptive work in history and his personal relationship with humanity.

7.2. It is selective

The Bible does not contain “all truth”, in that there are many scientific and other issues it does not touch on. Even with respect to Jesus it tells us next to

⁸ Erickson, Millard, 1983. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 175.

nothing about his physiological details: we do not know how tall he was, the shape of his face, or other personal, physical details.

Special revelation pertains to salvation history: the story of God covenanting himself with people, i.e., his making particular arrangements with people which lead progressively to God keeping his promise to Adam and Eve that one day the "seed of the woman" will crush Satan (Gen. 3:15).

7.3. It is progressive

God's revelation of himself is progressive with respect to time. The writing of the whole Biblical narrative took approximately 1500 years. The actual story from Abraham to Christ spans about 2000 years.

God's revelation of himself is also progressive with respect to content. God did not reveal everything from the beginning. Truths that were revealed concerning God and his relationship with mankind in the NT era were the culmination of his self-revelation as first seen in Genesis.

8. How did/does God reveal Himself?

In other words, what are the means of God's special revelation?

8.1. Through theophanies

Theophanies were appearances of God to particular people either in human form or as the Angel of the Lord. See, for example, the Lord's visit to Abraham prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:1-33), Jacob wrestling with an angel (Gen. 32:22-30), or Joshua being confronted by the "Lord of Hosts" (Josh. 5:13-15).

8.2. Through direct communication

There were times when God communicated his thoughts and will directly to people in an audible voice and in human language.

Ex. 33:11, "*Yahweh spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.*"

Ezek. 2:1-2, "*He said to me, Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you. The Spirit entered into me when he spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard him who spoke to me.*"

8.3. Through dreams and visions

Dan. 7:1-28, "*In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head on his bed: then he wrote the dream and told the sum of the matters.*"

Num. 12:6, "He [i.e. God] said, "Now hear my words. If there is a prophet among you, I, Yahweh, will make myself known to him in a vision. I will speak with him in a dream."

The Lord frequently uses dreams as a method of leading people to consider Christ in the Muslim world today.

8.4. Through miracles

In one sense miracles can be seen as a general revelation that points to the existence of "a" God. However, "the miracles of the Bible should not be regarded as mere marvels which fill men with amazement, but as essential parts of God's special revelation. They are manifestations of the power of God, tokens of his special presence, and often serve to symbolize spiritual truths".⁹

Deut. 4:34-35, "Has God tried to go and take a nation for himself from among another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that Yahweh your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? It was shown to you so that you might know that Yahweh is God. There is no one else besides him."

Jn. 2:11, "This beginning of his signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."

8.5. Through the incarnation

The word "incarnation" refers to "becoming a human being" by the second person of the Trinity.

a. The incarnation is the ultimate theophany

Jn. 14:9, "Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father?'"

Col 1:19, "For all the fullness [of God] was pleased to dwell in him [i.e. Christ]."

b. The incarnation is the ultimate direct communication of God to humanity

Jn. 1:14, "The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth."

⁹ Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 13.

Heb. 1:1-3, *“God, having in the past spoken to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, has at the end of these days spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds. His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purified us of our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”*

c. The incarnation is the supreme miracle

1 Tim 3:16, *“Without controversy, the mystery of godliness is great: God was revealed in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, and received up in glory.”*

8.6. Through the Holy Spirit

a. The Holy Spirit inspired both the OT and NT

Jn. 14:26, Jesus, addressing his disciples: *“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you.”*

Jn. 16:13, *“However when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming.”*

Ac. 28:25, *“When they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had spoken one word, “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah, the prophet, to our fathers, saying...”*

2 Pet. 1:21, *“For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit.”*

b. The Holy Spirit enables people to understand the Bible

For the same reasons that we need revelation we also need the Spirit of God to enlighten our understanding.

1 Cor. 2:12-13, *“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” (ESV)*

8.7. Through the Bible

This is a big subject, to which we will devote the next chapter.

IV

The Doctrine of Scripture

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” (2 Tim. 3:16)



GOD'S SPECIAL REVELATION is now primarily embodied in the written Scriptures. These documents preserve for us the content of what God has revealed to previous generations, and provide the standard by which we can measure all teaching and teachers today.

Rom. 15:4, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that through patience and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

2 Tim. 3: 15-17, “From infancy, you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Since the 17th century the doctrine of Scripture has been under almost constant attack so that today most non-Christians deny that the Bible has any supernatural quality. Until the mid-20th century, however, a strong doctrine of Scripture remained one of the distinguishing marks of evangelical Christians. Since then even people who claim to be evangelical have looser ideas on the nature of the Bible. Let us take a long, hard look at this important subject.

1. What claims does the Bible make about itself? What does it say about its own truthfulness?

1.1. The claims of Old Testament writers

a. The OT prophets claimed to speak on God's behalf

Deut. 4:2, “Now, Israel, listen to the statutes and to the ordinances which I teach you, to do them; that you may live, and go in and possess the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, gives you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall you take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you”

2 Sam. 24:12, “[God told the prophet Gad] *Go and speak to David, ‘Yahweh says, “I offer you three things. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you.”*”

Isa. 43:1 *“But now Yahweh who created you, Jacob, and he who formed you, Israel says: ‘Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name. You are mine.”*”

See also the opening words of most books of the minor prophets. See, for instance, Amos, where we read *“Thus says the Lord”* eight times in the first chapter.

b. God promised to put his words into the mouths of his prophets

Deut. 18:18, *“I will raise them up a prophet from among their brothers, like you. I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him.”*

Am. 3:7, *“Surely the Lord Yahweh will do nothing, unless he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets.”*

c. At times God commanded the authors to write down what he had told them

Ex. 17:14, *“Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua.’”*

Ex.24:4, *“Moses wrote all Yahweh’s words, then rose up early in the morning and built an altar at the base of the mountain.”*

Ex. 34:27, *“Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Write these words; for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’”*

d. To despise (i.e. treat as worthless) the word of the Lord is the same as despising the Lord himself

2 Sam. 12:9-10, *“Why have you despised Yahweh’s word, to do that which is evil in his sight?... therefore the sword will never depart from your house, because you have despised me...”*

e. The attitude of later OT writers to earlier parts of the OT

Joshua was to be a man of the book:

Josh. 1:7-8, *“Be careful to observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.”*

Psalms 1, 19 and 119 celebrate the truth of the earlier books, delight in repeating them, and urge people to meditate and obey them.

Prov. 30:5-6, *“Every word of God is flawless. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not you add to his words, lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar.”*

The prophets proclaimed the need for obedience to the Law.

Prophecies in earlier books were expected to be literally fulfilled: when Daniel discovers Jeremiah’s prophecy of a 70 year captivity he takes it literally (Dan. 9:1-3).

1.2. Jesus' view of the Old Testament

Jesus constantly quoted the OT, often using the formula, *“It is written ...”* (not least when Satan tempted him).

He often alluded to it, corrected contemporary misunderstandings of it, and rebuked his opponents for neglecting or misusing it. Note how much OT there is in his Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5-7).

Jesus also perceived himself as the one to whom the OT led, as he taught the two on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection.

Lk. 24:27, *“Beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”*

He stated that that not a pen stroke of the OT would pass away.

Mat. 5:18, *“For most certainly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished.”*

1.3. New Testament writers' view of the Old Testament

NT writers constantly use the OT to prove their statements about the gospel and Christian living.

Take a Bible with cross references and see how many quotations from or allusions to the OT you can find in Romans 3-5. You could try the same with Hebrews, but you would be overwhelmed with examples!

Rom. 15:4, *“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*

a. Paul states that the entire OT is God-breathed

2 Tim. 3:16-17, *“Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness*

that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Sometimes Paul writes "Scripture says" when he quotes an OT passage in which God speaks, as if the two mean the same thing. See, for example, Rom. 9:17 and Gal. 3:8 quoting Ex. 9:16 and Gen. 22:18.

Sometimes other NT writers do the same thing, quoting the OT as "God says" [Heb. 1:6-10] or "the Holy Spirit says" [Heb. 3:7; 10:15]. The prayer of Acts 4:24 ascribes Psalm 2 not only to David but also to both the "Sovereign Lord" and "the Holy Spirit".

- b. Peter teaches that the prophecies about the Messiah have been fulfilled in Jesus, and were inspired by God

2 Pet. 1:19-21, "We have the more sure word of prophecy; and you do well that you heed it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the morning star arises in your hearts. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit."

1.4. NT writers' view of their own writings

1 Jn. 1:1-4, "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we saw, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life (and the life was revealed, and we have seen, and testify, and declare to you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was revealed to us); that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us. Yes, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ. And we write these things to you, that our joy may be fulfilled."

- a. As the word of God

1 Cor. 2:7, "But we speak God's wisdom..."

1 Cor. 7:10, "But to the married I command – not I, but the Lord..."

1 Thes. 2:13, "For this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when you received from us the word of the message of God, you accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also works in you who believe."

2 Pet. 3:2, "You should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets and the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior."

b. As commissioned by God

1 Cor. 14:37, *"If any man thinks himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him recognize the things which I write to you, that they are the commandment of the Lord."*

Note John's testimony about the resurrected Christ commissioning him to write the Book of Revelation: Rev. 1: 17-19, *"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."*

c. As equal to the OT

Peter's testimony says about Paul's writing:

2 Pet. 3:15-16, *"Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you; as also in all of his letters, speaking in them of these things. In those, there are some things that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unsettled twist, as they also do to the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."*

2. **How was the Bible given?**

In other words, what is meant by the phrase *"all Scripture is given by inspiration of God"* (2 Tim. 3:16)? What, exactly, is inspiration?

Some English versions of the Bible have coined a word which more accurately reflects the original Greek word *theopneustos*: *"All Scripture is God-breathed"*

2.1. Inspiration is a process which involved two parties

Each of the Bible's books has two authors: God and the human partners he chose to work with. Theologians call this process concurrence. In other words, each Bible book is both God's word as well as that of the individual human authors: men like Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Matthew, John, Peter, Paul – about forty in total.

God and his human partners worked together through a process called inspiration. Inspiration means that God's Spirit was involved in shaping and guiding the thoughts and imaginations of the human writers so that they communicated the message of God and kept them from error as they did so.

2.2. Inspiration does not mean dictation (the mechanical theory of inspiration)

This theory holds that the Biblical authors were passive instruments, virtual typewriters of the Holy Spirit. This is the Muslim view of inspiration. With respect to the Qur'an the human author is considered to have been a completely passive recipient.

The advantage of this dictation theory is that it can explain the plenary and verbal nature of the Bible (see below). Its weaknesses are that the Biblical authors sometimes refer to different sources (e.g. a “Book of Jashar” in 2 Sam. 1:18, a “Book of the Acts of Solomon” in 1 Kings 11:41), that there are different writing styles which distinguish them, and that it doesn’t accord with the testimonies of the writers themselves on the subject.

God’s human partners were active participants in the writing process. Although some of them received their message through direct revelation, others did a lot of research before putting quill to papyrus. Some interviewed eye witnesses and others consulted old sagas and records. They often dictated their words to scribes who actually did the writing for them. What they wrote was carefully crafted to enable them to communicate God’s truth.

Lk. 1:1-4, “Since many have undertaken to set in order a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write to you in order, most excellent Theophilus; that you might know the certainty concerning the things in which you were instructed.”

2.3. The organic theory of inspiration

This emphasizes the combination of human and divine elements in the process of inspiration and in the writing of the Bible. It allows the original human co-authors their own individual characteristics, cultural norms and writing styles even as they express divinely directed thoughts in their own unique ways.

Because God’s Spirit made use of human agents in the writing of Scriptures, it reflects the way ordinary people experienced the world at the time of writing. For example, it talks about the sun going around the earth, and not the scientifically correct other way around; the original human co-authors were children of their times.

Some of the Bible's human co-authors were highly educated and some of them were not. Some didn’t follow the commonly accepted rules of grammar, others used round numbers and indirect quotes. God's Holy Spirit allowed them to reflect their own mind-sets and interests along with their historical concepts, images, cultural limitations and education as he inspired them to write a unified narrative.

In essence the Bible is a record of God's progressive revelation of his plan of salvation over the course of time in the language and cultural forms that the original recipients understood, as well as being a record of people's responses to that message at the intellectual as well as the faith and

emotional levels (like much of the book of Psalms).

There will always remain an element of mystery about the way the Bible came into being. Mystery accompanies all of God's dealings with his creatures. Just as the incarnation is a mystery of co-existence of human and divine, so the harmony of human and divine in the process of inspiration is also a mystery. We can describe it but not fully explain the underlying principles used by the sovereign Lord "*who works out all things in conformity with the purpose of his will.*" (Eph. 1:11).

In the process of inspiration God worked on the writers in an organic way, in harmony with the laws of their inner being. He used them just as they were, with their character, gifts, education and culture. He illumined their minds, prompted them to write, repressed the influence of sin in their literary activity, and guided them in their choice of words and expressions.

Louis Berkhof, *Intro. to Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker 1932, p. 153

2.4. Inspiration = Infallible, Plenary and Inerrant

The words infallible, inerrant and plenary refer to the fact that the Bible contains no mistakes, and that every individual word in the Bible matters.

a. Infallible

The Bible will not lead you astray. It is reliable, dependable, faithful to what God sought to communicate. As the *New Dictionary of Theology* puts it, infallibility "signifies the full trustworthiness of a guide that is not deceived and does not deceive."¹⁰

b. Inerrant

The Bible contains no errors of fact. "It signifies the total truthfulness of a source of information that contains no mistakes".¹¹

The doctrine of inerrancy pertains to the original manuscripts. Thankfully, as a result of biblical scholarship the current text is substantially identical with the Biblical originals. Restricting inerrancy to the original text does not mean that our present Bibles are errant. It only means that the inspiring took place once for all when the texts were written down.

Inerrancy only applies to what the Bible affirms. In other words, it reports the words of Satan and the lies of men (see for example, Gen. 3:4) accurately – but these are not what the Bible teaches as true!

¹⁰ *New Dictionary of Theology*, article "Infallibility and Inerrancy of the Bible." p. 337.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

c. Plenary

Plenary refers to the fact that inspiration and inerrancy covers all the subjects covered by Scriptures.

Jesus stated that not the smallest part of the OT would pass away (Mat. 5:18). The apostle Paul argued whether the law was to be fulfilled by the Jewish people or by Christ based on whether the word “seed” was singular or plural (Gal. 3:16). The apostle John cursed anyone who adds or takes away anything from the book of Revelation (Rev. 22:18-19).

Prov. 30:5-6, “*Every word of God is flawless... Do not you add to his words, lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar.*”

2 Pet. 1:20-21, “*No prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit.*”

d. Some qualification concerning inerrancy

Although the Bible is not a scientific textbook, inerrancy holds that what it teaches about creation, events in history, and its sociological and psychological observations are accurate. However, it describes these things the way they appear to the human eye. They are popular descriptions. Psa. 19:4-6 does not teach that the sun goes around the earth.

As already noted, inerrancy does not demand strict adherence to the rules of grammar. The language used reflects the writer’s linguistic ability and level of education. The gospel of Mark, for instance, only uses 1270 different words, and is written in “rough, ungrammatical Greek”¹². Luke, on the other hand, was “the only *literateur* among the authors of the NT books” who had “the native instinct not only to write well but to vary his style scene by scene”.¹³

Inerrancy does not exclude the use of figures of speech. Figures of speech are common; they do not express anything false because they are not meant to be understood literally. When we say “It’s raining cats and dogs” in English we don’t take this literally; we automatically recognize this to be a figure of speech.

Different genres (narrative, drama, poetry, etc.) need to be properly understood and interpreted. For example, parables are not necessarily

¹² Gen. Ed. Frank E. Gabelein. 1984. *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. p. 611-612.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 803.

true stories – each one is a story told to teach a particular truth. In poetry exaggeration is accepted if it is clear to the reader that this is the case. It uses imagery, symbolism, figures of speech, etc. to paint word pictures. Take Psalm 6:6, for instance: it is unlikely that David actually flooded his bed and drenched his couch with tears. He is, however, stating that he was utterly heartbroken, and could not cease weeping.

Psa. 6:6, "I am weary with my groaning. Every night I flood my bed. I drench my couch with my tears."

Inerrancy recognizes that different standards of precision were acceptable at different times in history, and that one need not tell every detail about the event being recorded (an impossible task). For instance, the gospels record the events of the life of Jesus in different chronological orders to highlight specific theological slants by grouping like-minded material together.

Inerrancy does not require verbal (word-for-word) exactness in the citation of the OT in the NT. In the history of literature it is common to give the general idea, a summary, or a general reference when referring to another source. Furthermore, citations in the NT involved translation from Hebrew into Greek (compare Rom. 14:11 with Isa. 45:23).

Inerrancy does not demand that the sayings of Jesus (or anyone else) contain the exact words he used, but that it conveys exactly what he or she meant to convey. Here too translation is involved (from Aramaic into Greek). In fact, the writers used a variety of techniques such as direct quotes, indirect speech and free renderings of what Jesus said.

Some scholars such as G. C. Berkouwer and James Orr reduced the scope of the Bible's infallibility to its teaching with respect to the way of salvation and "Christian faith and practice", leaving the possibility that it could be mistaken in such matters as history, geography and science. They basically hold to a view of "limited inerrancy". The word "inerrancy" came to be used by conservatives as a defence against the change in the way that scholars like Berkouwer and Orr came to use the word "infallibility".

"Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, (1) the Scriptures in their original autographs (2) and properly interpreted (3) will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm, (4) whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical or life sciences."

Feinberg "Meaning of Inerrancy", in *Inerrancy*, Geisler, ed. p. 294.

In response to the trend to limited inerrancy regarding biblical accuracy and truthfulness, the **Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy** was produced in 1978. Article 12 states:

“We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.”

2.5. Inspiration + Inerrancy = Authority

Because the Bible is equally divine and human—just like Jesus Christ—its message must be accepted as God’s word speaking to us in history. That means it must be accepted as the final rule of faith and conduct for every Christian, and as trustworthy in all its states. Everything the Christian believes about his faith, his religious experiences, his conscience, his church life, his interpretation of history and his expectations of the future must be anchored in and shaped by the Biblical narrative.

The Bible supersedes all other authorities such as, for example, the Pope, local church leaders, prophets, “The Church” (i.e. decisions made by a council of leaders or established by long tradition) and one’s self. The latter might be openly stated as, “I like to think of God like this ...” Or more subtly, as in “I’ve prayed about it and I feel God telling me that it is OK to do this....”

“My conscience is captive to the Word of God: to go against conscience is neither right nor safe; here I stand, there is nothing else I can do; God help me; Amen.”

Martin Luther

3. **What about allegations that there are mistaken facts and contradictions in the Bible?**

3.1. The definition of what a fact is differs according to genre (i.e. type of literature)

a. Historical facts

Historical facts are reflections of what took place in the past in a historical, narrative literary form. Historical texts are to be interpreted using a grammatical/historical hermeneutic (i.e., method of interpretation).

b. Poetic facts

Poetic facts are experiences or responses of individuals to a historical fact expressed in poetical terms. This, as noted above, can include poetic licence, such as exaggeration.

c. Wisdom literature facts

Wisdom literature consists of general truths about the way the world works based on human observation. They do not express inviolable truths but general principles which tend to hold true, even though there are many exceptions. For example:

Prov. 16:3, "*Commit your deeds to Yahweh, and your plans shall succeed.*"

Prov. 22:6, "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*"

d. Prophetic facts

Prophetic facts can consist of "forthtelling", i.e., reminding people of historical/covenantal facts using strong language and illustrations.

It can also consist of "foretelling", i.e., using language and illustrations of their own time to try to explain things in the distant future. Try explaining a visit to McDonalds to a 1st century prophet using only 1st century linguistic forms!

3.2. Students of the Bible have been aware of and have sought to harmonize so-called contradictions in the Bible since the time of the church fathers

The question of the staffs is often portrayed as one of the most glaring examples of a contradiction in the Bible. In Mat. 10:10 and in Luke 9:3 Jesus tells his disciples not to take a staff for the journey, and in Mark 6:8-9 he tells them to take nothing except a staff. The difficulty is resolved when you realize the verb translated "take" in Mark and Luke, *airo*, has a much wider meaning than the verb used by Matthew, *ptaomai*. *Airo* can mean "to lift up, to pick up, to acquire", while the meaning of *ptaomai* is limited to "to acquire, to purchase". In other words, Mark records Jesus telling his disciples to pick up their staffs and set out immediately, while Matthew and Luke record Jesus telling those disciples who didn't have a staff at hand not to be side-tracked from their journey by going to get one. They too were to go immediately, making-do with what they had.

The answers, or at least possible explanations, to many of these presumed problem texts have been available for centuries. There is nothing new under the sun (Ecc. 1:9).

Many supposed errors of historical fact that were confidently asserted in the past proved not to be errors at all.

Some books which deal with alleged errors and contradictions:

Josh McDowell in *Christianity, a Ready Defence* (chapter 11) and in *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, chapter 4;

Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*

Walter C Kaiser and others, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*.

4. How can we know that the Bible contains the right books?¹⁴

Are the Bible documents we have reliable? What was the process involved in the formation of the Bible?

Opponents of biblical inerrancy often claim that the documents of the Bible have not been accurately preserved. Muslims claim that they have been deliberately changed in order to support certain doctrines, such as the deity of Christ, which they say were not in the original documents.

Scholars have no clear idea about the formation of the OT canon, so we can skip that! It had taken place well before the 1st century, and had even been translated into Greek by that time. This Greek version of the OT, known as the Septuagint, was the most common Bible in the 1st century. It was considered an authoritative translation, and was the Bible which Jesus and the apostles accepted as inspired by God. It later fell out of disfavour with the Jews for this reason.

This discussion will focus on the formation of the New Testament.

4.1. The question of canon is a complex and multi-dimensional process

It has ecclesiological, historical and internal dimensions. It is not something that took place at a particular date (at, say, the Council of Carthage in 397 A.D.), but moved forward in stages.

The NT canon existed in one sense in the 1st century owing to the 27 books' apostolic origins. The recipients of the apostles' works accepted their writings as authoritative.

During the 2nd century a heretic named Marcion, who spurned all Jewish influence, rejected the entire OT, and created a truncated list of New Testament books (Luke and 10 of Paul's letters).

¹⁴ This discussion follows the lines of arguments made by Michael J. Kruger in his book *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*. Crossway, 2012.

Marcion's assertions shocked church leaders, who were galvanized to formulate their own list. In the 2nd century they came to recognize the scriptural qualities of most of the NT books. By the 4th century the church had achieved widespread consensus on all 27 books in the NT.

4.2. The 27 books of the NT were providentially provided by God

God providentially provided the church with those books he wanted to use to shape its doctrines and methodologies.

This means that there is no such thing as a lost canonical apostolic book; if a long-lost codex of, say, Paul was found it would not be added to the canon. (Note: Paul wrote at least two more letters to the Corinthians which are lost to history. See, for instance, 1 Cor. 5:9).

This is admittedly an entirely faith-based argument and, as such, not open to logical or historical refutations or counter-arguments.

4.3. The books of the NT have apostolic origins

A NT book had to have been written by an apostle, or be the result of the historical activity of an apostle, the record of which was put into writing by an eyewitness (e.g. Mark, Luke).

a. Counterargument 1: Many of these books were late, pseudonymous manuscripts

The books of the NT were not actually written by the apostles, nor during the apostolic age. They are just a collection of much later human writings, the product of random historical circumstances.

Refutation:

The early church fathers understood the connection between apostolic and canonical books and made a clear distinction between their own writings and those of apostolic origin.

The early church father Clement, a contemporary of some of the apostles (died circa 100 A.D.) quotes the OT as well as Matthew, Luke, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians and Hebrews as he seeks to bring healing to a schism in the Corinthian church.

“The apostles have preached the gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ: Jesus Christ has done so from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ” (1 Clement 42).

This holds true for other church fathers as well.

Ignatius (circa 105 A.D.): “Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles” (Magnesians 13).

Polycarp (circa 117 A.D.): “Let us then serve Him in fear, and with all reverence, even as He Himself has commanded us, and as the apostles who preached the Gospel to us, and the prophets who proclaimed beforehand the coming of the Lord” (Philippians 6).

Irenaus (circa 180 A.D.): “For the Lord of all gave to his apostles the power of the gospel through whom also we have known the truth, that is, the doctrine of the Son of God” (*Against Heresies* 3 Preface).

“The apostles, likewise being disciples of the truth, are above all falsehood” (*Against Heresies* 5.1).

The stylistic arguments marshalled by the mythical “critical consensus” of liberal scholars to back up their contention that the NT books are late, pseudonymous writings by unknown people is far from compelling and open to all sorts of competing interpretations. In fact, there is no consensus among liberal scholars on these matters.

Furthermore, in spite of their claim otherwise, liberal critics are not theologically neutral. Their methodologies are based on liberal critical scholarship, which is pre-suppositionally opposed to historic Christianity. Large numbers of theologically conservative scholars have convincingly defended the authentic apostolicity of the NT books. (B.B. Warfield, John Warwick Montgomery, Gary Habermas, C. Stephan Evans, A.A. Hodge, R. Laird Harris, Richard Swinburne [who is actually Orthodox], Bruce Metzger, R.C. Sproul, etc.).

b. Counterargument 2: The Canon-within-the-Canon Model

The church selected those books to be genuine which “brought unity to the faith”. By “peeling back the layers of history” scholars must seek to discover the “historical Jesus” or the “real message of Christ” (Schubert Ogden), or the earliest apostolic tradition that can be uncovered (Marxsen).

Various forms of textual analysis help in the reconstruction of the original sources, literary forms and purposes. Form critics like Bultmann try to reconstruct the original oral form the passage had when it was circulating in the 1st century”, while source critics try to reconstruct the written sources from which the gospel writers drew. According to redaction critics the apostles were not original authors at all, but merely editors who shaped the material according to their own theological predilections.

Refutation

In “peeling back the layers of history to find the real Jesus” these scholars are driven by their own philosophical and theological concerns and beliefs, which consequently results in them creating their own personal canon. In other words, they subject the scriptures to a criteria of truthfulness established by the critical scholar him/herself, who then edits out that which does not fit her/his ideological commitments. Their real question is: what *should* Jesus have been like, and what *should* he have preached... as far as I am concerned?

For feminist and liberation theologians that consists of one thing, while it is something else for, say, Luther (“the canon is whatever preached Christ”), or for James Dunn (the common core = the death and resurrection of Christ), or for Hans Kaseman (justification), or for promoters of *missio Dei* (the determining factor is God’s loving care for the world), etc.

Ever since the time of Albert Schweizer the idea that the tools of modern biblical criticism—form, source and redaction criticism—can reliably peel back the layers of history to reveal the “real historical Jesus” has been vigorously challenged (see Stanley Porter, L.T. Johnson, Craig Evans, etc.).

4.4. The Scriptures have divine qualities and thus are self-authenticating

The Bible itself testifies that it is the word of God.

2 Tim. 3:16, “*Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.*”

2 Pet. 1:21, “*For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit.*”

Rev. 22:18-19, “*I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book. If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.*”

The Bible’s internal evidence also testifies to its divine qualities and origin. This includes its doctrinal unity, efficacy to accomplish its purposes, and narrative harmony over thousands of years with dozens of authors. It was part of God’s sovereign plan to give the world a coherent message.

As such the Bible is a redemptive-historical unity which has a structural integrity based on the concept of God "covenanting" himself with specific people in the course of history to accomplish his purposes through them.

Rom. 15:4, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that through patience and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

a. Counterargument 1

There was no such thing as orthodoxy until after the establishment of the canon.

There were multiple, divergent and contradictory theologies in the early church (Walter Bauer; F.C. Baur). The books that made it into the canon represent the "winners" in the theological debates of the early church.

Refutation

The earliest church fathers agreed on a set of core beliefs, their standard of truth based on apostolic teachings (see Acts 15; 1 Cor. 15:4-5), long before the recognition of the full canon.

Irenaeus (circa 180 A.D.): "In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same life-giving faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth" (*Against Heresies* 3.3).

Tertullian (circa .207 A.D.): "Since the Lord Jesus Christ sent the apostles to preach, (our rule is) that no others ought to be received as preachers than those whom Christ appointed, for 'no man knows the Father except the Son, and he to whomever the Son will reveal Him.'" Nor does the Son seem to have revealed Him to any other than the apostles, whom He sent forth to preach..." (*Prescription Against Heresies* 21).

"The apostles were ignorant of nothing, and did not preach any (doctrines) which contradicted one another (*Prescription Against Heresies* 25).

Note too that the Apostles' Creed predates the canon.

Specific charges of theological inconsistencies (e.g. Paul vs. James) have long been addressed by multiple scholars.

b. Counterargument 2

Stating that we should believe in the canon because it claims to be so is circular reasoning.

Refutation

Many arguments that seek to authenticate foundational sources of belief use circular reasoning. For example, the only way to determine if your sense perception of the book in your hand is accurate is by examining its claims more closely – using your sense perceptions!

If you wanted to inquire if your rational faculties can produce reliable truth you can only do so using your faculty of reason.

c. Counterargument 3

If there is all this evidence in the Bible that it is of divine origin why is it that more people don't see and acknowledge it?

Refutation

Because of the effect of sin on the mind. The reason some refuse to believe the Scriptures is not that there is a defect or lack of evidence, but because those without the Spirit do not accept the things from God. Those without the Spirit of God are in no position to reliably determine the matter.

1 Cor. 2:10-14, *"The natural man does not receive the things of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned."*

See also Rom. 3:10-18

God's people recognize the voice of the shepherd in the Scriptures.

John 10:27, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."*

John 10:5, *"They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they do not know the voice of strangers."*

<p>"This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book"</p>
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4.5. The 27 books of the New Testament have come to be recognized as canonical by the church as a whole

Corporate acceptance was important because God's redemptive plan was not just to redeem individuals but a people, a covenant community, for himself.

Ac. 15:13-15, *“James answered, ‘Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has reported how God first visited the nations, to take out of them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets. As it is written...’”*

Ti. 2:13-14, *“we are looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.”*

1 Pet. 2:9, *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*

The church is the new covenant community to which God gave covenant documents that testify to its redemption. It has been *“entrusted with the oracles of God”* (Rom. 3:2).

1 Thes. 2:13, *“We also thank God without ceasing that when you received from us the word of the message of God, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also works in you who believe.”*

a. Counterargument 1

If these books were really from God why did the church take so long to recognize them?

Refutation

First of all, a core canon was well established from very early times.

Irenaeus (circa 180): *“But those who are from Valentinus, being, on the other hand, altogether reckless, while they put forth their own compositions, boast that they possess more Gospels than there really are. Indeed, they have arrived at such a pitch of audacity, as to entitle their comparatively recent writing “the Gospel of Truth,” though it agrees in nothing with the Gospels of the Apostles, so that they have really no Gospel which is not full of blasphemy”* (*Against Heresies* 3.11.9).

“In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same life-giving faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth” (*Against Heresies* 3.3).

“But that these [four New Testament] Gospels alone are true and reliable, and admit neither an increase nor diminution of the aforesaid number, I have proved by so many and such [arguments]” (*Against Heresies* 3.11.9).

Origen (circa 254 A.D.): "Many have taken in hand to compose a narrative of the events which are quite definitely familiar among us.' The Church possesses four Gospels, heresy a great many, of which one is entitled 'The Gospel according to the Egyptians,' and another 'The Gospel according to the Twelve Apostles.' Basilides also has presumed to write a gospel, and to call it by his own name... but only four Gospels are recognized. From these the doctrines concerning the person of our Lord and Savior are to be derived.¹⁵

"I know a certain gospel which is called 'The Gospel according to Thomas' and a 'Gospel according to Matthias,' and many others have we read - lest we should in any way be considered ignorant because of those who imagine that they possess some knowledge if they are acquainted with these. Nevertheless, among all these we have approved solely what the Church has recognized, which is that only the four Gospels should be accepted."¹⁶

Secondly, given the effects of sin, the spiritual forces attacking the church, and the practical realities of God delivering canonical books through normal historical channels, discussion and disagreement before (and even after) a consensus is reached is to be expected.

In any case, the level of disagreement and dissent was not nearly as widespread or problematic as liberal critics like to claim.

b. Counterargument 2

The canon is merely the product of the community of faith as it combated, suppressed or refuted other theologies (Walter Bauer). When, for instance, Marcion (d. 160 A.D.) produced a canon which suppressed the Jewish element in Scripture, other church leaders anathematized and suppressed him.

In short, the final consensus of the church is not a reliable indicator of canonicity, but simply the result of one theological system beating out the others.

The canon is nothing in and of itself; it is simply something because the church declares it to be so; it only becomes something because the church said it was so (James Barr, J.A. Sanders).

¹⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Luke: Fragments on Luke (Fathers of the Church)*, trans. by Joseph T. Lienhard, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1996.

¹⁶ Origen, *Homilies on Luke: Fragments on Luke (Fathers of the Church)*, trans. by Joseph T. Lienhard, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1996.

Refutation

This is a one-sided argument that does not take into account the multi-dimensionality of the matter. All aspects of canon: divine qualities, apostolic origins, and corporate reception work in tandem to provide a solid foundation for our knowledge of the canon.

Furthermore, that argument makes the community's authority greater than Scripture. This, in fact, is the Roman Catholic model:

"The canon exists because the church exists"; "We derive the essence of the Scripture from the essence of the church" (Karl Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, p. 373).

"Without the church there would be no New Testament" (Hans Küng quoted in Kruger).

In fact it is the other way around: the church is the creation of the canon. The earliest Christians had a canon in the OT and the earliest NT letters were received as Scripture by the earliest communities of believers.

Eph. 2:20, the church was "built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets".

Rom. 15:4, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that through patience and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

1 Cor. 10:6, "Now these things (i.e. these examples from the Old Testament) were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted."

2 Tim. 3:15-16, "From infancy, you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

1 Thes. 2:13, "For this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when you received from us the word of the message of God, you accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also works in you who believe."

2 Pet. 3:15-16, "Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you; as also in all of his letters, speaking in them of these things. In those, there are some things that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unsettled twist, as they also do to the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."

See also Gal. 1:6-24.

The early church recognized the authority of books which had been serving as sacred authority from the day they were penned.

c. Counterargument 3: the canonical-criticism model

This argument was pioneered by Brevard Childs (1923-2007) of Yale Divinity School. It states that the final form of the NT is the normative one because it brings together and harmonizes the divergent streams of early Christianity.

Furthermore canonical shaping was done afterwards “to loosen the text from any one given historical setting, and to transcend the original addressee.”¹⁷ The final redactors intentionally shaped the material into a medium that would allow it to be transmitted to future generations, and thus it “allows for the task of disciplined theological reflection of the Bible in the context of the canon.”¹⁸

Response

This moves the activity of inspiration beyond the apostles and prophets to include the whole church community. Neither the Bible nor history bears this out.

The Bible itself views inspiration as operating in key individuals at key junctures in redemptive history. It specifically forbids the emendation of the original text.

Deut. 4:2, “Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.”

Deut. 12:32, “You shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall you take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you.”

Prov. 30:5-6, “Every word of God is flawless. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not you add to his words, lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar.”

See also Rev. 22:18-19 above.

The early church did not view its own works as being on a par with that of the apostles. It saw its role as the preserver of the apostles’ texts, not their editor.

¹⁷ Brevard Childs, *The New Testament and Canon*. p. 23.

¹⁸ Childs, p. 103

If the documents can be continually shaped by successive Christian communities, then what makes the 4th century version special or normative? As Carl Henry points out, once again the church would have more authority than the books themselves (a bit like the Roman Catholic position).¹⁹

4.6. The Holy Spirit testifies that the Bible is the Word of God

The Spirit imposed the truth of the matter on the church.

Jn. 16:8, "*When he [the Holy Spirit] has come, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment.*"

This position receives strong support from W.L. Craig and G. Habermas.²⁰

Counterargument: the existential, neo-orthodox model

The Bible's authority exists when a person experiences God's word and responds to it in faith. This position is held by Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolph Bultmann, and other dialectical (i.e., neo-orthodox) theologians.

According to Barth the scriptures are not the word of God *per se*, but a witness to the word of God (Jesus Christ). It doesn't matter if the Bible contains historical mistakes; God can still use the fallible records of men to speak meaningfully to his church.

According to Bultmann the New Testament is "mythologically conditioned". What matters is an existential connection with God, not whether the contents of the Scriptures are true.

In other words, revelation is not a propositional statement about God but an encounter, something that happens to an individual. Thus the Bible becomes the word of God when an existential experience takes place. In certain books the church heard God speaking. These became the canon. Christians do not experience God in the Bible because it is canonical; the books are canonical because Christians experience God in them.

Refutation

The very concept of canon is undermined when all manuscripts are reduced to human-determined documents that bear no real authority in and of themselves.

¹⁹ Carl Henry, "Canonical Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 8 (1990).

²⁰ W.L. Craig, *Classical Apologetics*, p. 35-38; G. Habermas, "The Personal Testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Believer and Christian Apologetics," *Journal of Christian Apologetics* 1 (1997), p. 49-64.

If the canon is determined by each generation's experience of it, the Scripture has fluid edges. God can just as easily speak through books outside the canon like, for instance, Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* (Brunner and Bultmann would agree).

In fact, existential fulfilment would not even need the person of Jesus Christ at all. Any worthy historical figure could do as well (Karl Jaspers, Fritz Buri and Van Austin Harvey would agree). The concept of canon and propositional truth disappears.

Conclusion: The attributes of canonicity are mutually reinforcing. Canonicity is not based on a single claim, but taken together they present an intellectually sufficient ground for knowing which books belong in the canon.

5. Is the Bible all there is to "the Word of God"?²¹

5.1. "The Bible is the unique, infallible, written Word of God, but the word of God is not just the Bible"²²

The Bible sets the boundaries of everything God will ever say to mankind, but does not necessarily provide personal or communal leading which God may grant believers seeking to follow his leading in their service to him.

2 Tim. 3:15-17, "The holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

5.2. It is through the Bible that God meets with people, revealing the person of Jesus Christ, the living Word to them, with whom they can enter into a personal, life-transforming, "conversational" relationship.

For the Bible to become truly redemptive a personal relationship with God is needed. For that to happen the mere existence of the Bible is not enough. This is a form of Bible Deism which essentially holds that after God gave us the Bible he left us to make of it what we could, as he wouldn't speak to mankind any more, either through the Bible itself or in other ways.

The Bible is God's word in a unique, written form. It is not the same as Jesus Christ, the living word, whom the believer is invited to relate to on a daily,

²¹ This section drawn from Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Building an intimate relationship with the Creator*. London, Harper Collins, 1999, p. 134-135.

²² Willard, p. 135

personal basis. The point of Bible preaching and teaching is to lead Christians into a deeper relationship with the Living Word. The Bible is a means to that end.

Jn. 15:4, "Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you, unless you remain in me."

Rom. 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are children of God."

Eph. 1:17-18, "May [the Father of glory] give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he worked in Christ, when he raised him from the dead."

5.3. Inerrancy of the original texts does not guarantee right interpretation

In spite of the best hermeneutics (principles of Bible interpretation) only the Holy Spirit can reveal the things of God to the natural man. He must illumine the believer.

1 Cor. 2:12-16, "But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might know the things that were freely given to us by God.... Now the natural man does not receive the things of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual discerns all things, and he himself is judged by no one. "For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him?" But we have Christ's mind."

A new Christian was asked if she enjoyed reading her new Bible. "Sir," she replied, "I am not reading this book. This book is reading me!"

6. **Is revelation ongoing? Does God still reveal new things about himself?**

There is nothing to stop an omnipotent God from giving further revelation, but if anyone claims to have received new revelation(s), we should ask the following questions:

6.1. Revelation about what?

If God added new teaching about the way of salvation, it would show that the way of salvation already revealed in Christ is either incomplete or false.

It would also reveal something different about his character, would undermine existing Scripture, and the question of the canon would have to be reopened.

However, people can grow in their personal relationship with God, can get a deeper insight into the things of God as they walk with him in fellowship with the Spirit and in accordance with the teachings of the Bible, and can receive personal leading and guiding as they seek to “*keep in step with the Spirit*” (Gal 5:25).

In the course of its history the church’s theological understanding of such doctrines as, say, the nature of the Trinity and the dual nature of Jesus Christ has grown and deepened.

6.2. Revelation through whom?

How do you test if a prophecy is true? By the existing Scriptures. A new revelation through a new prophet must either show that the present revelation is incomplete or false, or that the new prophet is false.

However, this does not mean that God does not lead his people as they seek to do his will in ministry. Many a devout Christian has prayed for guidance with respect to personal leading and Christian ministry and received very specific answers to their prayers. Yet these answers are always within the framework of Biblical teaching and norms.

6.3. If the Bible is sufficient, what is it sufficient for?

The “sufficiency of Scripture” is a term used by evangelical theologians to state that the Bible needs no additions and will tolerate no subtractions.

Prov. 30:5-6, “Every word of God is flawless. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar.”

Rev. 22:18-19, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book. If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.”

Psa. 119:105, “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.”

a. It is sufficient for God to reveal himself to people

Rom. 10:17, “So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

b. It is used by God to equip his people for life and service

2 Tim. 3:16-17, “Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

- c. It is through living and demonstrating its message that the Church reveals something of God to others

Eph. 3:10, "Now through the assembly the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places."

Phil. 2:15, "...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without defect in the middle of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you are seen as lights in the world..."

Mat. 5:14, "You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill cannot be hidden."

Conclusion

Theology must be very different from other academic disciplines in that it should not merely try to push the intellectual boundaries. It must also call the church back to the "old paths" of Scriptures.

Jer. 6:16, "Yahweh says, "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."

The nature of the genuine Christian's relationship with God is with a person, not the letters on a page—though that personal relationship takes place within the covenantal framework set forth in the New Testament.

V

The Attributes of God: What is He like?

*"I am God, and there is no other.
I am God, and there is none like me" (Isa. 46:9).*



WE HAVE SEEN *how* God has revealed himself: through general and special revelation. We now consider *what* God has revealed about himself. In other words, what is he like? The different aspects of God's nature are referred to as his attributes, or essential qualities.

God is not hopelessly mysterious, as he is made out to be in much contemporary theology. He is knowable! Because he is faithful to his character you can learn to trust him!

This, in fact, should be the great quest of the Christian: to really know God for who he is. Knowing God deepens and builds our relationship with him, which increases our love and obedience. For example, to know that God is changeless means that we can expect him to deal consistently with us. His love and attention remain the same even though ours may change and dim.

1. What is meant by the phrase "the attributes of God"?

They are those qualities of God which make him what he is; they are the characteristics of his nature.

God's attributes are permanent; they cannot be gained or lost. They are inseparable from his being or essence. He possesses each of them in infinite measure.

All the divine attributes are true for all three persons of the Trinity; all the divine attributes are shared equally by all three persons of the Godhead. They describe God both in his essential being, as well as with respect to his relationship to creation. They are like facets of a diamond which, when put together, give us a picture of God.

The perfection of his attributes demand that God act consistently with his own nature, and to personally provide a legally acceptable substitute in the place of sinful mankind if he was to reach out to them in perfect love and grace. In other words, the perfection of his attributes means that God cannot act in any arbitrary fashion. He must act within the framework of his own perfection. We will look deeper into this when we study the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement.

Knowing the attributes of God should help us maintain a high view of him. It should enrich our prayers and deepen our trust. Focus on them in your devotions.

“What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”
A.W. Tozer, 1963. *The Knowledge of the Holy*

2. How can finite, sinful man know the holy, transcendent God?

We can never fully understand God’s nature. There will always remain an element of mystery regarding God, as Job learned the hard way: “*Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know*” (Job 42:3).

This problem is compounded by the limitations of human language. Not only is language limited by our own conceptual horizons, words often have multiple meanings. For example, a cookie can be a flat, tasty, baked piece of dough, data sent to a browser which tracks your web usage, a Scottish bun, a North Carolina doughnut and, metaphorically, someone can be a “tough cookie”. In short, the meaning of words is derived from the context in which they are used.

2.1. The limitations of language

Ezekiel describes a vision of God’s glory but concludes, “*This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord*” (Ezek. 1:28). In other words, “I have used human language and comparisons, but in fact I have tried to describe the indescribable!”

2.2. Different forms of language used to describe God

How can human speech about God be meaningful, i.e., how can it actually describe God, if he is radically different from his creation? There are various types of speech forms which the Bible uses when seeking to describe God.

- a. Univocal speech: used when a word describes something literally: “The rock is hard”; “God is spirit”.
- b. Equivocal speech: poetic terms which are meant to evoke a sensation. In his poem *The Highwayman* Alfred Noyes describes the moon as “a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas”.

The Bible uses lots of equivocal speech in its poetic passages, but it would be difficult to build a systematic theology on passages using equivocal speech forms. Example: “You are my rock and fortress” (Ps. 31:1).

- c. Analogical speech: a description in which the describing term is both like and unlike the thing it describes.

For example, we understand the love of God by comparison with human love. But is it exactly the same as human love? Think of the love of a man for his wife, or of a mother for her baby, or of an old lady for her cat...

Analogies allow us to get a very limited insight into, say, the absolute love as it exists between the persons of the Trinity. Although it may be limited, it is, nevertheless real as far as it goes.

Another example: “God is wise” versus “John is wise”.

We can understand something of these concepts because we are created in God’s image, which means he instilled in us speech patterns through which he can communicate genuine truths about himself to us.

- d. Anthropomorphic language: descriptions in which human attributes are attributed to God.

Anthropomorphic language helps us understand God’s attributes by comparing them with things which are familiar to us, as in “God lays bare his arm” (i.e., he rolls up his sleeves). He is also portrayed as “repenting”, “feeling sorry” that he did something, etc.

However, we must be very careful not to misuse anthropological descriptions and end up misrepresenting God. The danger of anthropomorphic language is that people dismiss as anthropomorphic aspects of God they don’t like, and cannot fit into a tidy theological system.

For example, some early church theologians found it difficult to accept the idea of God grieving because their idea of him was shaped in part by neo-platonic notions about God being untouched by emotion or passion. This idea is called the impassibility of God. The Bible, however, portrays God as a concrete, personal being who feels deeply, and who can be grieved as he interacts with people on the basis of the covenant promises he made with them. This makes him very different from the Greek – or, for that matter, the Islamic – portrayal of God.

Gen. 6:6, “*Yahweh was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart.*”

Isa. 63:10, “*They rebelled, and grieved his holy Spirit.*”

Eph. 4:30, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

2.3. Through using multiple literary approaches

In spite of linguistic limitations, it is still quite possible to come to know enough about God to trust, love and relate meaningfully to him.

Multiple literary approaches help create as accurate a picture as possible of the ways and attributes of God. For instance, to understand the love of God, we need more than a familiar word and some human comparisons. We must observe the way God acts and speaks throughout Scripture.

In short, the Bible teaches the attributes of God in various ways: by plain doctrinal statements, in poetry, and through narrative. For example, 1 John tells us that "God is love". Psalms and other Bible poetry praise God for his love in poetic ways, and Bible narratives relate events which display the love of God in action.

2.4. Although our knowledge of God is incomplete, we can be certain about that which he has revealed about himself

Because God is bound by the perfection of his character and word we can believe and act with confidence on such knowledge as he has revealed about himself. He can be trusted to act consistent with what he has revealed. He does not act arbitrarily. He is bound by his own character and word. So, even though our knowledge of him is not complete, we can act on what we do know with perfect confidence.

And, thankfully, God has revealed much about himself! We can build on those aspects of his character which we know. That makes the God of the Bible vastly different from the ancient gods who acted capriciously, and also from the Muslim concept of God, who is not bound by anything.

3. How are God's attributes classified?

There are various ways in which God's attributes can be categorized. For example, you can talk about his moral attributes (truth, goodness, holiness, etc), which point to God being a moral being, and his non-moral attributes, like infinity, omnipresence, etc. Or you can distinguish between his active attributes (love, omnipresence, power, etc) and his passive attributes (unity, self-existence, etc.).

The most common division of God's attributes are between his incommunicable and communicable attributes, though this division is not hard and fast.

3.1. God's incommunicable attributes are those which he does not share with his creatures

They are not analogous (seen) in man. They show how God is not like us as in, for instance, his eternity, omniscience, or omnipotence.

3.2. God's communicable attributes are those which he shares in a limited sense with his creatures

These are the attributes we share in a limited sense because we are created in the image of God. The object of the communicable attributes is the universe in general, and mankind in particular. In other words, the purpose of the universe is to display the fullness and glory of God's character.

God's communicable attributes are one of the reasons that explain why the universe exists, in that creation is the object of God's communicable attributes. It reveals in all their glory such divine attributes as his mercy, love and wrath in their ultimate forms and, as such, bring glory to God.

4. What are some of the incommunicable attributes of God?

4.1. God is unique

Deut. 4:35, *"There is no one else besides him [i.e. Yahwe God]."*

1 Kin. 8:60, Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple was *"that all the peoples of the earth may know that Yahweh himself is God. There is no one else."*

Psa. 86:10, *"For you are great, and do wondrous things. You are God alone."*

Isa. 44:6-8, *"This is what Yahweh, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, Yahweh of Armies, says: "I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God. Who is like me? ... Is there a God besides me? Indeed, there is not. I do not know any other Rock."*

Isa. 40:18, *"To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to him?"*

Isa. 45:5-6, 18 *"I am Yahweh, and there is no one else. Besides me, there is no God... there is no one besides me. I am Yahweh, and there is no one else."*

Isa. 46:9, *"I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me."*

This was a lesson Israel learned the hard way. Abraham was saved from polytheism, yet the nation's history is one of constant backsliding, polytheism and henotheism (the idea that there are many gods out there, but we only serve one of them), to eventually becoming the world's strictest monotheists

after the Babylonian exile. It was on this basis of uncompromising Jewish monotheism that the doctrine of the Trinity was revealed. Without that base Christianity would have become either tritheism (belief in three gods) or modalism (the idea that God reveals himself in different forms, like a man being a father, husband and grandfather at the same time).

4.2. God is holy

The reason this attribute is of primary importance is because it defines his other characteristics. Because God is holy in his being, every other expression of his being, including his will, is holy. It is the attribute which “permeates” all others, and the primary one by which God wanted to be known in the OT. God’s love is a holy love. His wrath is a holy wrath. His mercy is a holy mercy, etc.

In Isaiah God is described over thirty times as “the Holy One of Israel.”

Understanding the concept of God’s holiness rightly is of huge importance, for holiness as God’s defining characteristic is disputed today; much of contemporary evangelicalism prefers to regard God’s defining characteristic as love.

The Hebrew term for holy is *quadash* and the Greek is *hagios*. The meaning of both words is: "different, separate from, distinctive." It is also related to words for brightness, fearfulness and purity.

Absolute holiness belongs to God alone. No one and nothing is holy apart from God and that on which or those to whom he bestows it. He is the only source of holiness.

There are two aspects to God's holiness:

- a. Majestic holiness. This underlines God's separateness from his creation, i.e., his transcendence. When perceived it produces a response of awe and fear in man.

Ex. 15:11, “Who is like you, Yahweh, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?”

1 Sam. 2:2, “There is no one as holy as Yahweh, for there is no one besides you, nor is there any rock like our God.”

Isa. 57:15, “For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

- b. Ethical holiness. This refers to moral excellence. God cannot sin, and is separated from all that is evil.

Hab. 1:13, *"You who have purer eyes than to see evil, and who cannot look on perversity."*

1 Jn. 1:5, *"This is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."*

God's ethical holiness means that he cannot be the source of evil. He is revolted by it. Divine wrath is God's holy nature's reaction to evil and sin.

We see this in the apostle Peter's reaction when he recognized his own unworthiness.

Lk. 5:8, *"But Simon Peter... fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord."*

This means that whatever theological system you adhere to, it cannot be fully monergist (the idea that God is the ultimate source of every action that occurs in the universe).

There are multiple demonic and human wills jostling with each other. It will not always be that way—one day the prayer *"your will be done"* will become reality. For now, however, many things in this world have their source in the evil one. We will discuss the nature of God's sovereignty in chapters XIII and XIV.

Because God is holy, man's reaction to God's ethical holiness should be conviction of sin. In order to relate to him we need to be as righteous as he is. That is very different from the way we relate to each other.

Isa 6:5, *"Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of Armies!"*

His holiness demands atonement for sin. What his holiness demanded his love provided in Jesus Christ.

As already noted, God's holiness defines his communicable attributes: holy love, holy mercy, holy wrath, etc. Thus the common phrase "God is good, always good" can be misleading if taken apart from the fact that that goodness may not be goodness as people generally understand it. It is a *holy* goodness. This is true of all his characteristics.

Holiness is the only divine attribute found in triplicate in both the Old and the New Testaments:

Isa. 6:3, *"Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!"*

Rev. 4:8, *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come!”*

4.3. God is self-existent

He is utterly independent. The ground of God’s being is himself; the ground of creation’s being is God. He has need of nothing and no one outside of his own being. The ground for existence derives from him; all other things derive their being from another. He is complete in himself. He exists because “He is” (Ex. 3:14). He was not created. He created all things.

Ac. 17:24-25: *“The God who made the world and all things in it, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, neither is he served by men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself gives to all life and breath, and all things.”*

Rev. 4:11: *“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honor, and the power, for you created all things, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!”*

In relation to his creation, God is transcendent. That is, he is above creation, greater than the creation, distinct from it and independent of it.

4.4. God is Spirit

God is not an impersonal spirit (Hegel), but a person who is spirit. In other words, he is a spirit who has self-consciousness and self-determination. He has the characteristics of personhood: intellect, will, feelings, desires, etc.

Because God is spirit he is not hampered by the restrictions and corruption that we associate with the body.

Because he is spirit, he forbids us to picture or depict him in any way.

Ex. 20:4, *“You shall not make for yourselves an idol, nor any image of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth”*

The fact that God is spirit means that he is not limited by his creation. It also means that he cannot be immediately discerned by our bodily senses for he is not only invisible, his existence is different from ours in its essence. (Although angels are also spirits, they are limited because they are created beings.)

Jn. 1:18, *“No one has seen God at any time. The one and only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has declared him.”*

Jn. 4:24, *“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

Col. 1:15, *“[Christ] is the image of the invisible God...”*

1 Tim. 1:17, *"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen."*

1 Tim. 6:15-16, *"He alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and eternal power. Amen."*

Heb. 11:27, *"He (Moses) endured, as seeing him (by faith) who is invisible."*

The fact that God is spirit does NOT mean that he is an impersonal force as, for example, described in Star Wars. He is personal.

4.5. God is personal

This means that he is someone, not something. He has names. He communicates. It is possible to know him. He has feelings; he can grieve. He can be provoked to anger.

The fact of the Trinity also indicates that God is personal, for the persons of the Trinity relate to one another in love.

As already noted, the fact that God is personal makes him very different from the neo-platonic Greek conception of God.

Ex. 20:5, *"I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God."*

Deut. 9:7, *"You provoked Yahweh your God to wrath."*

Jer. 25:6, *"Do not provoke me to anger."*

Jer. 32:30, *"The children of Israel have only provoked me to anger with the work of their hands, says Yahweh."*

4.6. God is eternal / infinite

God has no beginning and no end. He is free from the limitations of time (his eternity) and space (his omnipresence). God stands outside of time and, in fact, is the cause of time.

Isa. 40:28, *"Haven't you known? Haven't you heard? The everlasting God, Yahweh, The Creator of the ends of the earth, does not faint. He is not weary. His understanding is unsearchable."*

God's eternity is implied by his names "I am" (Ex. 3:14) and "El Olam", which means God everlasting (Gen. 21:23).

One day a man asked God, "How long is 1000 years to you?" "Just a fleeting second," came the reply. "And how much is a million dollars to you?" the man asked next. "Just a penny", was the answer. "In that case, Lord, can I have a penny," the man asked. "Maybe... in just a second," came the reply.

4.7. God is immutable (unchangeable)

This means that he is always the same – and thus can be relied on. His life is always fully developed. He alone is always complete. There is no growth, no improvement, no decrease and no deterioration with him. What he is, he always has been and always will be. Yet he is never static. He is the living God who relates faithfully with mankind according to his covenant arrangements.

Deut. 7:9, “Know therefore that Yahweh your God himself is God, the faithful God, who keeps covenant and loving kindness with them who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations...”

Lam. 3:22, “It is because of Yahweh’s loving kindnesses that we are not consumed, because his compassion does not fail.”

Mal. 3:6, “For I, Yahweh, do not change; therefore you, sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”

Jam. 1:17, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, nor turning shadow.”

When considering God’s immutability we must be very careful not to fall into a neo-platonic view of God’s impassibility (i.e., the view that he has no emotions).

The doctrine of God’s immutability is also at odds with process theology, the idea that God constantly develops, evolves, along with everything else in the universe.

God’s immutability is hugely important for it implies self-limitation. In other words, God acts within certain boundaries, the boundaries of his character and word and, as such, is trustworthy. He will never go back on his promises, because his word is as immutable as He Himself is.

(We will examine the interplay between human responsibility and the nature of God’s providence, divine foreordination and predestination in Chapters VIII Q. 9, XIV Qs 5-30).

4.8. God is omnipresent

This means that all of God is present in all places at all times. He is everywhere, all the time, in the totality of his person. He transcends all spatial limitations, and yet is present everywhere with his whole being.

Yet we must be careful not to take his omnipresence in a pantheistic sense where God is considered the substance of all things, or that everything is God.

1 Kin. 8:27, Solomon at the dedication of the temple: *"But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!"*

Psa. 139:4-10, *"Where could I go from your Spirit? Or where could I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there! If I take the wings of the dawn, and settle in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there your hand will lead me, and your right hand will hold me."*

Jer. 23:24, *"Can anyone hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? says Yahweh. Do not I fill heaven and earth?"*

Heb. 4:13, *"There is no creature that is hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account."*

See also Isa. 66:1.

4.9. God is omniscient

This means that God knows and understands everything.

God's knowledge differs from human knowledge in certain fundamental respects. First of all, it is complete. There is nothing that God does not know. Our ignorance will always surpass our knowledge.

God's knowledge is eternal. It extends beyond time and includes all that has been, is, will be, or could be.

God's knowledge is certain. There can be no doubt or error. This overlaps with the fact of his eternity, since he knows all about the choices we shall make and the outcome of events.

God's knowledge is innate. It belongs to him by nature. He does not have to learn because he is the all-knowing God.

Note the following specific areas of God's knowledge.

a. God's knowledge concerning himself

Revelation is God's self-disclosure, and points us to the fact that God has perfect self-awareness and self-knowledge. There can be no gaps in what God knows about Himself.

1 Cor. 2:11, *"For who among men knows the things of a man, except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so, no one knows the things of God, except God's Spirit."*

b. God's knowledge concerning creation

Psa. 147:4, *"He counts the number of the stars. He calls them all by their names."*

Mat. 10:29, *"Are not two sparrows sold for an assarion coin? Not one of them falls on the ground apart from your Father's will."*

c. God's knowledge concerning humanity

Job 31:4, *"Does he not see my ways, and number all my steps?"*

Psa. 134:4, *"There is not a word on my tongue, but, behold, Yahweh, you know it altogether."*

Prov. 5:21, *"For the ways of man are before Yahweh's eyes. He examines all his paths."*

Mat. 6:8, *"Your Father knows what things you need before you ask him."*

Mat. 10:30, *"The very hairs of your head are all numbered."*

d. God's knowledge concerning the future

Isa. 46:9-10, *"I am God, and there is none like me. I declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done. I say: My counsel will stand, and I will do all that I please."*

Ex. 3:19, *"But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand."*

This realization is of great comfort to the believer. As expressed in an old hymn, "God is still on the throne, and he will remember his own". This is the message of the book of Daniel as well. See also Psalm 139:1-6.

Divine knowledge and wisdom does not mean that, somehow, God should provide answers to nonsense questions. "Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable?" Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable. How many hours are there in a mile? Is yellow square or round? Probably half the questions we ask—half our great theological and metaphysical questions—are like that." C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 1961, p. 55.

4.10. God is omnipotent/sovereign

Divine omnipotence means that he can do all things. He has unlimited resources and power.

Gen. 18:14, *"Is anything too hard for Yahweh?"*

Psa. 145:3, *"Great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised! His greatness is unsearchable."*

Jer. 32:17, *"Ah Lord Yahweh! Behold, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for you."*

Rom. 11:36, *"For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever!"*

Eph. 3:20, *"Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think..."*

The omnipotence of God is a great comfort to believers because it assures them that he is capable of carrying out his promises.

"God's part is to put forth his power; our part is to put forth faith." Andrew Bonar

"We never tap the infinite resources of God until we attempt the impossible."

F.B. Meyer

Closely related to God's omnipotence is the fact that God is sovereign. This means that he is the supreme ruler of all. He rules over all things visible and invisible, over the affairs of men and of angels, according to his sovereign will.

Psa. 115:3, *"Our God is in the heavens. He does whatever he pleases."*

Dan. 2:21-22, *"He (i.e. God) changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings, and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals the deep and secret things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him."*

Dan. 4:34-35, *"His (i.e. God's) dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he does according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can stay his hand, or ask him, What are you doing?"*

Eph. 1:11, *"(we Christians) having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who does all things after the counsel of his will."*

John Calvin pushed the sovereignty of God to a level which seems to contradict the idea that God cannot do that which is against his revealed character.

“Whatever things are done wrongly or unjustly by man, these very things are the right and just works of God” (*Concerning Eternal Predestination*, p. 169)

“God is the chief and principal cause of all things” (*Concerning Eternal Predestination*, p. 177).

However, God has power over his own power. In other words, he has chosen to limit the use of his power to the accomplishment of his purposes (i.e., *after the counsel of his will* Eph. 1:11) at any particular time.

For example, he has as yet not driven sin out of the universe by a display of his power (as will happen when Christ returns). His omnipotence is further limited by two things:

- a. He cannot do that which is contrary to his holy nature.
- b. He cannot break his promises/word. For example, he cannot lie, and he cannot deny himself. This means he is utterly trustworthy. (In fact, to lie would show him not to be omniscient.)

Num. 23:19, “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not make it good?”

2 Tim, 2:13, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful. He can not deny himself.”

The sovereign Lord is able to carry out his plan in a sinful universe without being contaminated by it. Because he is sovereign, his hand is always in any good which comes out of evil, but never in the evil itself.

Think of God’s sovereign power as an unstoppable laser beam which will bore through any obstacle which tries to prevent it from reaching its goal. The ultimate goal of God’s use of his sovereign power in time and space is clear: “*This is the will of my Father who sent me, that of all he has given to me I should lose nothing, but should raise him up at the last day. This is the will of the one who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son, and believes in him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*” (Jn. 6:39-40)

4.11. God is all-wise

Wisdom is distinct from knowledge; it is the ability to apply knowledge rightly. Notice two particular areas in which God’s wisdom is evident:

- a. In nature. Think of the universe with all its intricacies and complexities. It shows that God can apply his infinite knowledge to the task of creating and sustaining at every level.

Psa. 104:24, *"Yahweh, how many are your works! In wisdom have you made them all. The earth is full of your riches."*

- b. In the means of salvation. The gospel is the product of God's wise design. In fact, the plan of salvation shows God's wisdom at its peak.

1 Cor. 1:21, *"For seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe."*

We are completely unable to reach God through our own wisdom. Instead, God planned to bring mankind to the end of its own speculation and to an acceptance of his revelation in Christ. We are then on the way to attaining a much superior form of wisdom (1 Cor. 2:6, 7).

Rom. 16:25, gospel = *"the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages."*

Eph. 1:7-8, *"In whom (i.e. Christ) we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence."*

Rom. 11: 33 *"Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!!"*

A grandfather saw his young granddaughter kneeling at her bed, with her head bowed and hands folded, repeating the alphabet. "What are you doing?" he asked her. "I'm saying my prayers, but couldn't think of what I should say, so I'm just saying all the letters of the alphabet and God can put them together however he thinks best," she answered.

4.12. God is truth

God is the one who is real and genuine. Truth is part of his being. He is the God of Truth (Isa. 65:16). This means that he is all that he should be. He can be trusted for he will never deceive, fail or forsake. He will not lead you astray. He wants to guide you into all truth.

Jer. 10:10, *"But Yahweh is the true God. He is the living God, and an everlasting King."*

Jn. 17:3, *"This is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and him whom you sent, Jesus Christ."*

Rom. 3:4, *"Yes, let God be found true, but every man a liar."*

1 Thes. 1:9, *"You turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God..."*

1 Jn. 5:20, *"We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we know him who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."*

Rev. 15:3, *"Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God, the Almighty! Righteous and true are your ways, you King of the nations!"*

Deut. 31:8, *"Yahweh himself is he who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged."*

5. What are some of the communicable attributes of God?

5.1. God is good

The Bible defines that which is good in terms of God: he alone is completely good, and the one from whom all goodness flows. All goodness originates with him. Any goodness in man is not his own, but is derived from being created in God's image and being the subject of God's common grace (see box below).

Jam. 1:17, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, nor turning shadow."*

The meaning of good in Hebrew includes the concepts of kindness, graciousness and moral uprightness. It also includes grace, mercy, love, patience and long-suffering, compassion, tenderness, pity.

Ex. 34:6, *"Yahweh! Yahweh, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth."*

Psa. 100:5, *"For Yahweh is good. His loving kindness endures forever, his faithfulness to all generations."*

Psa. 106:1, *"Praise Yahweh! Give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good, for his loving kindness endures forever."*

Mk. 10:18, *"No one is good except God alone."*

Lk. 18:19, *"No one is good, except one: God."*

God is good to humanity in general. This is referred to as his providence, and is seen in his common grace.

Psa. 145:9, *"Yahweh is good to all. His tender mercies are over all his works."*

Mat. 5:45, *"He (God) makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust."*

Ac. 14:17, "Yet he did not leave himself without witness, in that he did good and gave you rains from the sky and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

He is also good to sinners

Rom. 2:4, "Do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

Rom. 5:8, "But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Psa. 86:5, "For you, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive; abundant in loving kindness to all those who call on you."

He is good to believers

Deut. 33:29, "You are happy, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by Yahweh?"

Common Grace promotes the good and restrains evil

God blesses mankind with many things which do not pertain directly to salvation. As a result of God's common grace societies are preserved. Thankfully, there is much that is good, beautiful and uplifting in the world. Without it the world would be little different from hell.

Thanks to common grace most people can appreciate the beauty and harmony of creation. Some create works of great beauty in the fine arts, music or architecture or develop skills with respect to their jobs from which they receive pleasure. The advances in the physical sciences which have made life more comfortable for most also testify to God's common grace, as does the fact that most people possess a sense of morality and decency and seek to love and take care of their families, and protect human life. Some even seek the greater good, sometimes at great personal sacrifice. Such things as good government, educational institutions, medical care, charitable organizations and caring communities, all testify to God's common grace. When God withdraws it, things break down and there is a rapid deterioration of public order or the quality of life.

5.2. God is love

Love involves feelings, an emotional bond. Some people deny that God can have feelings, because they imply susceptibility to impressions from without, and that, they feel, is incompatible with a changeless God.²³ However, the Bible consistently portrays God as one who feels deeply about things.

God cannot exist without loving. Love is part of His essence—it has existed within the Trinity from eternity. To speak of God is to speak of love, and to

²³ See Lister, R.2013, *God is Impassible and Impassioned*. Wheaton: Crossway, for an extensive treatment of this subject.

speak of love is to speak of God. In other words, God was love before there were human beings to love.

Mat. 3:17, *"Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

Jn. 17:24, *"You [Father] loved me [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world."*

1 Jn. 4:16, *"God is love."*

The word "God" comes from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning "The Good". This was an important insight because it meant that in the minds of the Anglo-Saxons God was not only "the Greatest" of all beings, though they recognized that as well, but that he was also "the Best".

Boice, J.M. 1991. *Romans: An Expository Commentary*, Volume 1, p. 210.

The Greek word used for God's love is *agape*. This is love which longs to give, and seeks the good of others with no thought of self.

Jn. 3:16, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."*

1 Jn. 4:10, *"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

Eph. 2:4-5, *"But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."*

God's love is unconditional: we can neither earn it nor forfeit it. For example, see how David approached God after his great sin.

Psa. 51:1, *"Have mercy on me, God, according to your loving kindness. According to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions."*

In terms of relating to people, however, the Bible almost always links God's love to them with what Christ has accomplished on the cross. Common grace shows his deep care for people, but to insist that God will love them for eternity outside of the cross of Christ is misleading.

"God's love is the exercise of God's goodness toward individual sinners whereby, having identified himself with their welfare, he has given his Son to be their Saviour, and now brings them to know and enjoy him in a covenant relation."

J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chapter 12.

5.3. God is righteous / just

The Hebrew word for righteous is *tsedhek* and the Greek is *dikaiosune*. Both mean that God is right, fair, impartial, correct: a perfect judge. He is fair in all his dealing. In fact, his own righteousness is the only standard acceptable to him.

He is impartial in all his dealings with mankind, and perfect in his administration of justice. He established a moral world and imposed on man just and righteous laws with accompanying sanctions.

a. He is completely righteous in himself

Righteousness is part of his character.

Deut. 32:3-4, "For I will proclaim Yahweh's name. Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock: his work is perfect, for all his ways are just. A God of faithfulness who does no wrong, just and right is he."

Ezr. 9:15, "Yahweh, the God of Israel, you are righteous."

Psa. 145:17, "Yahweh is righteous in all his ways, and gracious in all his works."

Isa. 45:19, "I have not spoken in secret, in a place of the land of darkness. I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in vain.' I, Yahweh, speak righteousness. I declare things that are right."

b. He is completely just in dealing with people

Because of his righteous character, he maintains justice in the universe by establishing laws for men to follow—laws they know innately—and by distributing rewards and punishments according to the prescription of these laws (see also discussion on hell).

Gen. 18:25, "Be it far from you to do things like that, to kill the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be like the wicked. May that be far from you. Shouldn't the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Psa. 96:13, "He [Yahweh] comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, the peoples with his truth."

If God does not justly punish sin, he would be 'unjust to himself'. Anselm

c. God also displays his justice in redemption

Rom. 3:24-26, "Christ Jesus, whom God sent to be an atoning sacrifice... to demonstrate his righteousness at this present time; that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus."

d. To believers, the righteousness of God is both an encouragement in trials and a challenge to faithful life and service

God promises to reward faithful believers in tangible ways for faithful service, and to avenge them in due time.

Lk. 18:7, *“Will not God avenge his chosen ones, who are crying out to him day and night, and yet he exercises patience with them?”*

Rev. 6:10, *“They cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, Master, the holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”*

1 Cor. 3:12-15, *“But if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or stubble; each man’s work will be revealed. For the Day will declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself will test what sort of work each man’s work is. If any man’s work remains which he built on it, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, but as through fire.”*

2 Tim. 4:8, *“From now on, there is stored up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing.”*

Heb. 11:26, *“Accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he (i.e. Moses) looked to the reward.”*

5.4. God is wrathful

This is the other aspect of his righteousness: he will not let the guilty go unpunished.

In a sense his wrath is an aspect of his love. If he did not act to deal with and finally destroy sin and evil, would he be loving?

Ex. 20:5, *“I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and on the fourth generation of those who hate me...”*

Ex. 32:9-10, *“Yahweh said to Moses, “I have seen these people, and behold, they are a stiff-necked people. Now therefore leave me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them, and that I may consume them...”*

Deut. 9:7-8, *“Remember, and do not forget, how you provoked Yahweh your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you left the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against Yahweh. Also in Horeb you provoked Yahweh to wrath, and Yahweh was angry with you to destroy you.”*

2 Kin. 22:13, *“Great is Yahweh’s wrath that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that which is written concerning us.”*

Jn. 3:36, "One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

Rom. 1:18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness..."

Rom. 1:32, "[those] who, knowing the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them."

2 Thes. 1:8, "...giving vengeance to those who do not know God, and to those who do not obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus."

If God failed to punish sin he would destroy himself by contradicting his divine character as righteous law-giver and judge, and he would destroy us by contradicting our human dignity as morally responsible persons created in his image... The cross demonstrates with equal vividness both his justice in judging sin and his mercy in justifying the sinner. For now, as a result of the propitiatory death of his Son, God can be "just and the justifier" of those who believe in him. He is able to bestow a righteous status on the unrighteous without compromising his own righteousness.

John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 1986, p. 211.

God is most problematic and 'dangerous' for us (theologically speaking) when he is in passion: angry, cursing, in rage, crying, broken hearted over his creatures, and suffering to free them. These are unbecoming aspects of God which we had not expected to encounter.

M.D. Meek, "God's Suffering Power and Liberation" *Journal of Religious Thought* 33 (1976):52.

5.2. God is merciful/gracious

Grace relates more to man in his state of guilt, while mercy relates more to man in his miserable condition as a result of his sin and guilt.

GRACE = God's Riches At Christ's Expense

Ex. 3:7, "Yahweh said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows."

Psa. 103:8, "Yahweh is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness."

Mat. 14:14, "Jesus went out, and he saw a great multitude. He had compassion on them and healed their sick."

Mk. 1:41, *“(Jesus) being moved with compassion, he stretched out his hand, and touched him, and said to him, “I want to. Be made clean.”*

2 Pet. 3:9, *“The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”*

2 Cor. 1:3-4, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”*

Ti. 2:11, *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.”*

Peter Miller, a Baptist pastor in Ephrata, PA, was a friend of George Washington, the first president of the USA. Another man living in Ephrata, Michael Wittman, was an evil man who did all he could to humiliate Miller. One day Wittman was arrested for treason and sentenced to death. Miller then travelled 70 miles on foot to Philadelphia to plead for the life of the traitor.

“No”, George Washington said, “I cannot grant you the life of your friend”.

“My friend?” exclaimed the old preacher. “He’s the worst enemy I have!”

“What? cried Washington. “You’ve walked 70 miles to save the life of an enemy? That puts things in a different light. I’ll grant you your pardon.” Miller took Wittman home with him, no longer as an enemy but as a friend.

C.B. Larson, ed. 1994. *Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching*, p. 142.

5.3. God is tolerant / patient / longsuffering

The Greek word is *anoches*, which means forbearing, holding back, delaying, pausing. It means that God does not immediately implement the judgment we deserve when we break his law. For example, he did not kill Adam right away when he disobeyed (Gen. 1:17). He put up with the pre-diluvians for 120 years while Noah was building the ark and preaching to them. He put up with the Canaanites for 400 years (Gen. 15:12-16), with Israel in the wilderness for 40 years. He sent fresh prophets to Israel every generation. He bears with sin for a long time before he finally exercises judgment.

Num. 14:18, *“Yahweh is slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, forgiving iniquity and disobedience; and he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and on the fourth generation.”*

Rom. 2:4, *“Or do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”*

Rom. 9:22, "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath made for destruction?"

2 Pet. 3:8-9, "But do not forget this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but he is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Conclusion

A study of the attributes of God can never be complete because by nature God is infinite. However, a study of his attributes should make us more aware of his greatness, and lead us to a deeper sense of awe and reverence in worship. We should constantly meditate on the attributes of God as a stimulus to praise and prayer. In other words, doctrine must lead to doxology!

VI

The Names of God

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower” (Prov. 18:10).



IN THE BIBLE a person’s name often reveals something of their personality. For example, Jacob means “he grasps the heel”, which was an expression for deceiving someone and, as such, an accurate description of his character (see Gen. 25: 24-26; 27:33-36).

No single name can reflect the greatness of God, inasmuch as the giving of names also imposes limitations, as in: the person is NOT this or that. That is why God is given multiple names in the Bible. Every name represents some aspect of God’s character and covenant relation with his people.

This being the case the misuse of God's name is a serious sin.

Ex. 20:7, “You shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain, for Yahweh will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”

God’s names also reveal that he is personal in nature, for his names refer primarily to his relationship and actions with respect to people. He is not a nameless force or an abstract idea. His names are a source of comfort and strength to God’s people.

Prov. 18:10, “The Name of the Lord is a strong tower.”

Gen. 12:8, “He (i.e. Abraham) built an altar to Yahweh and called on Yahweh’s name.”

Psa. 8:1, “Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth, who has set your glory above the heavens!”

Psa. 20:7, “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we trust the name of Yahweh our God.”

Rom. 10:13, “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Jam. 5:14, “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the assembly, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

See also Psa. 8.

1. What names are used to refer to God?

1.1. El = a common Semitic word for god (theos in Greek)

This is not so much a name but a word meaning God in Semitic languages. The word is found in other ancient Middle Eastern religions. For example, it also refers to the Canaanite high god whose son was Baal. It is translated as *theos* in Greek, the word used for the Greek Olympians like Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo, Venus, etc.

The limitations of language means that people have to use the words available in their language.

Bible translators have to choose an existing word for God and give it new meaning. Sometimes people from other religious traditions object when Christians adopt their word for God.

The Arabic word Allah is derived from the word "el". It is used in both the Qur'an and in Arabic translations of the Bible, although the concept of God is fundamentally different in Islam.

1.2. Combinations with El

In the Bible the word El is often combined with other words. These combination words are in one sense descriptions of God's character, but are at the same time used as names for God.

a. El Elyon = God Most High

Gen. 14:18, "*Melchizedek king of Salem... was priest of God Most High.*"

b. El Shaddai = God Almighty

Gen. 17:1, "*Yahweh appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty. Walk before me, and be blameless.'*"

c. El Olam = God Everlasting

Gen. 21:33, "*Abraham planted... called there on the name of Yahweh, the Everlasting God.*"

d. El Ro'i = The God who sees

Gen. 16:13 "*She called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, 'You are a God who sees.'*"

1.3. Elohim = The plural form of El

Elohim is the Hebrew word for God that appears in the first sentence of the Bible. Elohim is a plural form of El, and occurs 2570 times in the OT. It is used for both the God of Israel and pagan gods.

Just as El suggests power or might, Elohim means even more power and might. Elohim is the one with ultimate power and might, the ultimate God.

Even though Elohim is a plural noun in the Bible it is combined with a singular verb and often has a singular pronoun as its complement.

Gen 1:1, *“In the beginning God (Elohim) created (singular) the heavens and the earth.”*

Gen. 1:31, *“God (Elohim) saw (singular) all that he (singular) had made, and behold, it was very good.”*

Elohim is also used with plural pronouns.

Gen. 1:26, *“And God (Elohim) said: ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”*

This plurality may be a sign of collectiveness or of intensity. It can also be seen as the plural of majesty, since kings and rulers often used plural pronouns when referring to themselves.

In the light of the rest of the Bible, Christians feel justified in seeing this as foreshadowing the revelation of God as a Trinity, as a Tri-une being.

1.4. Yahweh (YHWH)

Although Elohim and the el-combinations are used as names of God, the only true, personal name of God is Yahweh. It is the name he revealed to Moses and to his covenant people.

Ex. 3:14-15 [translated literally]: *“Elohim said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ Elohim also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘Yahweh, Elohim of your fathers – the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac and the Elohim of Jacob – has sent me to you.’ This is my name for ever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”*

See also Ex. 6:2-7.

The name Yahweh is related to the verb "to be", so the meaning conveyed is "the one who is actively present" or "the self-existent One."

Ex. 20:2, *“I am the LORD Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”*

Elohim, El and even Adonai may be applied to human authority figures or to false gods. The name Yahweh applies only to God himself. It is the personal name of God used in connection with his covenant people. In English Bibles, this name is usually translated as LORD (i.e. written in capital letters).

The name Yahweh eventually ceased to be spoken because the Jews considered the name too holy for speech.

Ex. 20:7, *“You shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain, for Yahweh will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”*

Lev. 24:16, *“He who blasphemes Yahweh’s name, he shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him. The foreigner as well as the native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.”*

1.5. Combinations with Yahweh

Yahweh is also used in combinations. Most of these names were revealed in relation to some human need, and assure us that Yahweh will be all that his people require for that need.

- Yahweh Rohi: The LORD my Shepherd (Psalm 23)
- Yahweh Yireh: The LORD will provide (Gen. 22:14)
- Yahweh Tsidkenu: The LORD our righteousness (Jer. 23:5)
- Yahweh Mekaddischen: The LORD your sanctifier (Ex. 31:1)
- Yahweh Shalom: The LORD is our peace (Jud. 6:23)
- Yahweh Shamma: The LORD is there (Ezek. 48:15)
- Yahweh Tsabaoth: The LORD of Hosts, meaning “the commander of the heavenly armies” or “The LORD Almighty” (NIV) (1 Sam. 1:3)
- Yahweh Nissi: The LORD my banner (Ex. 17:15)

Yah/Jah/ Iah is a shortened form of Yahweh, and was often used in personal names. Isaiah means Ya saves, Hezekiah means Ya strengthens and Zephaniah means Ya has protected. “Hallelujah” means “Praise-Jah”.

The English hymn writer, William Cowper, wrote a series of poems on some of these names, culminating in a hymn of praise to Jehovah-Jesus.

1.6. Adonai

The Hebrew word *adonai* means sovereign or lord. On a human level, *adonai* is used of the relationship between a king and his subjects or between a master and his servants or slaves. Your lord is the one you obey, the one who is in charge, the one you are loyal to, the one under whose authority and responsibility you fall.

This word is also used in the Bible to describe God. He is the one to be feared, honoured, loved and obeyed. God has the authority.

In the Greek NT it was translated as *kurios*.

Rom. 1:4, "*iesou christou kuriou*"

Rom. 1:7, "*kuriou iesou christou*"

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the NT statement that Jesus is Lord. It was a confession of faith at a time when Caesar was to be regarded as lord.

Lk. 2:11, "*For there is born to you today, in David's city, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*"

1 Cor. 8:6, "*To us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we live through him.*"

See also: Psa. 110:1 applied by Jesus to himself in Mat. 22:41-46.

As Lord Jesus is the ruler of his people. He is the head of his body, the church. That must affect everything about them: their minds, their ethics, their career, their churches, their relationship to each other and the world.

1.7. The connection between YHWH and Adonai

For the Hebrews the personal name of God was so holy that they did not pronounce it. Whenever they saw the four letters of God's name they would say *Adonai*, Lord, instead. So YHWH and *Adonai* became very closely linked in their minds.

For hundreds of years the Hebrew language was written with consonants only. When vowels were added later to make reading easier, Jewish scholars decided that with the name YHWH, they would add the vowels of the word *Adonai*, because that is what would be read out loud. So you would get the following word YaHoWaH (Jehovah in English), which was read aloud as *adonai*. In fact, we do not know for certain how the name YHWH was pronounced, but the most likely answer is that it should be pronounced as Yahweh.

Where the Hebrew writes *adonai* YHWH, English translations usually write "Sovereign LORD".

Deut. 3:24, "*O Sovereign LORD, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god (el) is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do?*" (NIV)

When we realise that in the Jewish mind the word *adonai*, lord, was very closely linked with Yahweh, then we can see that the statements in the NT about Jesus being Lord have a very exalted meaning.

2. Are there other titles which reflect God's character?

2.1. The Holy One of Israel (*qados yisrael*).

This is Isaiah's distinctive name for God. It is used it 25 times to emphasis both God's transcendent holiness and his immanence, or nearness, to his people.

Isa. 1:4, *"They have forsaken Yahweh. They have despised the Holy One of Israel."*

2.2. Ruler/king (*malik*)

This title is clustered in poetic passages in the prophets and the Psalms. The idea of God as ruler is expressly asserted in the enthronement psalms (93, 96-99), but is already found in Psalms 2, 37, etc.

Psa. 37:2, *"Yahweh Most High is awesome. He is a great King over all the earth."*

2.3. Father

The range of meanings contained in the idea of father include authority and discipline, as well as compassion, care, protection, and provision.

a. OT use of God as Father

Deut. 32:6, *"Is this the way you repay Yahweh, foolish and unwise people? Is he not your father who has bought you? He has made you and established you."*

Isa. 63:16, *"You, Yahweh, are our Father. Our Redeemer from everlasting is your name."*

See also Isa. 64:8, Jer. 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal. 2:10.

b. NT use of God as Father

Jesus personalized the idea of God as our father. He even used the very familiar term "Abba, Father" in prayer.

See Mk. 8:38; 11:25; 13:32; 14:36; Lk. 11:2.

Paul used the term father to refer to God in terms of his relationship with Jesus Christ, as well as in terms of his relationship with the world and with all believers.

Eph. 1:3, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Eph.3:14, *"I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Eph. 4:6, *"There is ... one God and Father of all."*

Rom. 1:7, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Rom. 8:15, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

See also Eph. 5:20; 6:23; Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 8:6.

2.4. God of the ancestors (fathers)

A title associated with the patriarchs, and especially with God's promises to them (Ex. 3:13).

God of Abraham (Gen. 28:13; 31:53; 1 Chron. 29:18).

Fear of Isaac (Gen. 31:42,53).

Mighty One of Jacob (Gen. 49:24).

God of Israel (Num. 16:9; 1 Sam. 5:8; Psa. 41:13).

2.5. Some other names

Judge (Isa. 33:22); Warrior (Ex. 15:3); Shepherd (Ps. 23); Mother who gives birth, nurtures, and trains her children (Deut. 32:18; Isa. 49:15; Hosea 11:1-4); Rock (Psa. 31:7; Isa. 44:8).

Ps. 89:26, "You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation!"

See also Deut. 32:4,15,18,31.

VII

The Trinity

*“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.” (2 Cor. 13:14)*



THE AUTHORS of the NT had a full-fledged understanding of the Trinity which they declined to fully articulate. They often make casual allusions or brief digressions to the idea of the Trinity when they are talking about other things. It appears that this seemed so obvious to them that, as far as they were concerned, it did not need a full explanation.

The reason is probably because, as we shall see, there is a soteriological necessity for the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity would probably not have arisen on the basis of the two testaments in isolation of each other. On the basis of the NT alone Christianity might have slipped into tritheism (three gods) or Arianism (see below).

1. Is God a simple unity?

The basic creed of the OT revelation was stated in Deut. 6:4, *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”* What does that mean?

1.1. God is one

He is indivisible. He cannot be split into a collection of attributes. All of God’s attributes are true of all of God all the time. Everything pertaining to God is holy, eternal, etc.

This OT doctrine was repeated by Jesus Himself

Mk. 12:28-30, “One of the scribes... asked him, “Which commandment is the greatest of all?” Jesus answered, “The greatest is, ‘Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.”

1.2. There is only one God

This teaching is connected to, but not identical with the fact that God is one.

Deut. 4:35, *“It was shown to you so that you might know that Yahweh is God. There is no one else besides him.”*

1 Cor. 8:4-6, *“There is no other God but one. For though there are things that are called “gods”, whether in the heavens or on earth; as there are many “gods” and many “lords”; yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we live through him.”*

Psa. 86:10, *“For you are great, and do wondrous things. You are God alone.”*

Eph. 4:6, *“there is... one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all.”*

Jam. 2:19, *“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder!”*

It took Israel as a nation a long time to accept this truth. With the exception of its great spiritual leaders, OT Jews up to the time of the Babylonian exile tended to think of their God as one of many gods. Maybe he was the greatest, maybe he was the only one for them, but there were other gods beside him. Maybe he was only sovereign over the territory controlled by Israel (this was something Jonah seemed to think). This idea is called henotheism.

The Bible itself sometimes acknowledged this belief.

Ex. 15:11, *“Who is like you, Yahweh, among the gods?”*

1.3. OT hints of plurality within the one God

The OT contains allusions, early indications, of the trinity which make sense only with the fuller NT revelation.

a. The name Elohim, the plural form of God

b. The fact that God creates by means of both his Spirit and his Word

Gen. 1:2, *“Darkness was on the surface of the deep and God’s Spirit was hovering (or “brooding”) over the surface of the waters.”*

Psa. 33:6, *“By Yahweh’s word, the heavens were made.”*

c. Theophanies

A theophany is an appearance of God in human form, referred to as “the Angel of the Lord” in the OT.

Zech. 3:1-2, *"He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before Yahweh's angel, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary. Yahweh said to Satan, "Yahweh rebuke you, Satan! Yes, Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!"*

See also Gen. 18:1-2, 13-14, 23-33; Ex. 3:2, 6, 14.

d. The personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8

e. Passages where two separate persons have divinity attributed to them

Psa. 45:6-7, *"Your throne, God, is forever and ever. A scepter of equity is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness, and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows."*

Psa. 110:1, *"Yahweh says to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool for your feet."*

f. Threefold blessings and threefold worship

Num. 6:24-26, *"Yahweh bless you, and keep you. Yahweh make his face to shine on you, and be gracious to you. Yahweh lift up his face toward you, and give you peace."*

Isa. 6:3. *"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty."*

g. Certain prophetic writings

Isa. 9:6, *"For to us a child is born. To us a son is given; and the government will be on his shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

Dan. 7:13-14, *"I saw in the night visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of the sky one like a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. There was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."*

Until the incarnation, however, the triune nature of God was not fully revealed. That is when the earliest Christians began to reread the OT from a trinitarian and Christological perspective.

2. **How did Christianity come to accept the doctrine of the Trinity?**

2.1. The word trinity does not occur in the Bible

The Greek word *trias* was first used by Theophilus of Antioch around the year 180 A.D. The Latin word *trinitas* seems to have been coined by Tertullian around 200 A.D.

The absence of the word in the Bible does not mean it does not teach the doctrine. It is, in fact, one of the core teachings of Christianity. The Trinitarian claim that God is one, yet there are three who are God, is unique to Christianity. Christianity stands or falls with the Trinity. Even the World Council of Churches demands belief in the Trinity by its members.

1 Pet. 1:1-2, "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen ones... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood.*"

2.2. The doctrine of the Trinity is one of Christianity's most attacked teachings

It is rejected by Islam as well as by groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, who try to undermine the faith of uncertain Christians by claiming that the doctrine has no biblical basis.

2.3. It took time for Christians to formulate a full-orbed definition of the Trinity

The early Christians experienced the triune God without trying to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. They knew God as Father, they worshipped Christ as the Son of God, and they experienced the indwelling reality of the Holy Spirit of God in their lives.

As time went on, however, it became necessary for Christians to define more clearly what they believed about God, especially when the church was confronted by false teachings or misleading explanations of what the Bible says on the subject.

In the early centuries of the church various people tried to express their understanding of Biblical teaching, but their definitions led to controversy. Eventually a clear statement that the Father and the Son were of the same substance was made in the Nicæan formulaton in 325 A.D. This was adapted in 381 A.D. to include a similar statement about the Holy Spirit. In 451 A.D. an even fuller definition, the Chalcedon formulation was produced.

3. **What is the Biblical basis upon which the church formulated its doctrine of the Trinity?**

3.1. God the Father is described as deity

Note that the word "Father" is used in different ways in reference to God, not always referring only to the first person of the Trinity.

a. God as Father sometimes refers to the whole Godhead

1 Cor. 8:6, "Yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we live through him."

Jam. 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, nor turning shadow."

b. God as Father sometimes refers to his relationship with Israel in the OT

Deut. 32:6, "Is this the way you repay Yahweh, foolish and unwise people? Is he not your father who has bought you? He has made you and established you."

Isa. 63:16, "For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, Yahweh, are our Father. Our Redeemer from everlasting is your name."

c. God as Father describes his relationship with NT believers

Mat. 5:45, "...that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust."

Mat. 6:6, 8, 14, "But you, when you pray, enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly... Therefore do not be like them, for your Father knows what things you need, before you ask him... For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

1 Jn. 3:1, "See how great a love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God!"

d. God the Father as a distinct person within the godhead

Jesus speaks of himself as distinct from the Father and as being sent by him about 10 different times.

Jn. 10:15, 17-18, "Even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father... Therefore the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down by myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father."

Jn. 5:36-37, "But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John, for the works which the Father gave me to accomplish, the very works that I do, testify about me, that the Father has sent me. The Father himself, who sent me, has testified about me."

3.2. The Son, i.e. Jesus Christ, is described as deity

Here are a few preliminary verses from John. We shall examine far more evidence for the deity of Jesus Christ in chapter XI.

Jn. 1:1, 14, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Jn. 10:30, "I and the Father are one."

Jn. 12:44-45, "Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me. He who sees me sees him who sent me. He who sees me sees him who sent me."

Jn. 14:9, "Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Jn. 20:28, "Thomas answered him (i.e. Jesus), "My Lord and my God!"

1 Jn. 5:20, "We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we know him who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

3.3. The Holy Spirit is described as deity

a. The Holy Spirit is consistently described as a person, not as a force

The Greek word for spirit is neutral but in John's gospel the masculine pronouns "he" and "him" are constantly used of the Spirit as he performs personal actions.

Jn. 14:16-17, 26, "I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive; for it does not see him, neither knows him. You know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you... But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you."

Jn. 15:26, "When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me."

Jn. 16:8, 13-14, "When he (the Spirit) has come, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment... However when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will

not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming. He will glorify me, for he will take from what is mine, and will declare it to you."

1 Cor. 2:10-11, "*The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For who among men knows the things of a man, except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so, no one knows the things of God, except God's Spirit."*

b. Lying to the Holy Spirit is equated with lying to God

Ac. 5:3-4, "*But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land. While you kept it, did it not remain your own? After it was sold, wasn't it in your power? How is it that you have conceived this thing in your heart? You haven't lied to men, but to God."*

c. The Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son

Mat. 12:31-32, "*Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come."*

Jn. 15:26, "*When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me."*

3.4. Three-in-Oneness as described in the Bible

In a number of places the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are mentioned together in ways that imply full equality.

Mat. 28:19, "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*

2 Cor. 13:14, "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen."*

Lk. 1:35, "*The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore also the holy one who is born from you will be called the Son of God."*

Rom. 8:9-10, "*But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if it is so that the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his. If Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of righteousness."*

3.5. Biblical distinctions within the Trinity

The three persons of the Trinity are equal but not identical, though they share the same divine status. They share the same value, nature and essence but are not exactly the same. They are distinct from each other but each is equally God. Each can use the pronoun "I" of themselves and "you" of the other persons of the divine being, yet they must not be conceived of as separate individuals.

Mat. 3:16-17, "Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Jn. 14:26, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you."

Mat. 28:19, "Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

4. **How have people tried to make sense of the doctrine of the Trinity?**

4.1. Getting it wrong

Most wrong teachings about the Trinity were genuine efforts to explain the concept. Trying to explain it so that it makes complete logical sense is a trap missionaries, evangelists and pastors can still fall into.

a. Modalism [or Sabellianism]

There is one God, who shows himself in different modes, or forms, like an actor who plays different parts in the same play. In other words, God sometimes shows himself as Father, sometimes as the Son and sometimes as the Spirit. Father, Son and Spirit are all manifestations of the same God. This view was first taught by Sabellius in the early 3rd Century.

It doesn't explain the fact that the Father, Son and Spirit sometimes appear as distinct persons simultaneously in one biblical passage.

It logically entails the idea of *patripassianism*. Since Jesus is the Father and the Spirit, all three suffer because they are all one person.

b. Arianism [or Monarchianism]

Arius, who lived in the 4th century, denied Jesus' eternal Sonship. He held that the second person of the Trinity was not fully divine, but that he was "like the Father". He thought that only God the Father was eternal and that

the Son and the Spirit were created by the Father before the rest of creation. Arius did say that the Son had a position that was unlike any other created being, and that the Son was supernatural.

Col. 1:15 calls Jesus the "firstborn". Arius took this as a literal description. However, first-born is also a metaphor for having the right of leadership and authority as, for example, in Ps. 89:27: "*And I will appoint him (i.e., King David) to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.*"

Today Jehovah's Witnesses and some Unitarians hold Arian-like views.

Arius: "If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence; hence it is clear that there was a time when the Son was not... If you say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father as the Son does, why do you not say that he is the brother of the Son? If he proceeds from the Son, why do you not say he is the grandson of the Father?" **Arius**, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1972, XI, p. 618; Bettenson, H. ed. *Documents of the Christian Church*, 1963, p. 26.

c. Subordinationism (with respect to Jesus' essence).

Subordinationism agrees that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all eternal, but does not agree that they are equal in essence. The Son and the Spirit are held to be of inferior essence than the Father.

The Bible does indicate that there is a voluntary subordination of the Spirit and the Son to the Father within the Trinity. This, however, is not a subordination of essence but of roles.

1 Cor. 15:28, "*When all things have been subjected to him (i.e. God), then the Son will also himself be subjected to him who subjected all things to him, that God may be all in all.*"

d. Adoptionism

Adoptionism is an extreme form of Arianism. In this view, Jesus was a normal human being. God adopted Jesus as a special person, but Jesus was not divine, not eternal and not supernatural. Jesus is just a great human being who was especially empowered by God.

e. The Qur'an

Muslims strongly deny the Trinity, but this is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the doctrine. The Qur'an wrongly expresses the doctrine as belief in three gods: God the Father (Allah), Jesus Christ, and Mary.

Surah 5:116, "*And behold! Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah?"*"

4.2. Getting it right

Each person of the Trinity is a self-conscious being, yet never acts independently or in opposition to the others. The Bible ascribes the same honor to each person of the Godhead. Each is worshiped equally as God. The divine attributes are common to each. God is one in will, essence and personality. The diversity manifests itself in Persons and tasks.

The diversity within the Trinity is seen most clearly in man's redemption (see, for example 1 Pet. 1:2), where we see a certain subordination in the relationships of the persons to each other (though not in their nature): "the Father works through the Son by the Spirit. As the Son is sent by the Father, so the Spirit is sent by the Son. As it was the Son's office to reveal the Father, so it is the Spirit's office to reveal the Son."²⁴

"God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God." **W. Grudem**, p. 226.

To combat heresy and wrong understandings of the Trinity, the early church wrote a series of definitions, each of which dealt with a particular heresy.

a. The Nicene formulation about the person of Christ (325 A.D., revised 381 A.D.)

I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

²⁴ R.A. Findlayson, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3, 1988, p. 1599.

In A.D. 589, the Nicene formulation was modified to state that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and from the Son" (the Filioque clause). This was based on John 14:26, "*But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you*", and on John 16:7. "*Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*"

This filioque was accepted by the church in the West (based in Rome) but rejected in the East (based in Constantinople). The Greek and Russian Orthodox churches still maintain this difference.

b. Athanasian and Chalcedonian definitions are the fullest statements of the Trinity

These creeds sought to restate in propositional terms the teachings of the Bible. The purpose of the bishops who met at Nicaea and Constantinople was not to try and explain the mystery of the Trinity logically, but to establish the boundaries of Christian thought in relation to the Trinity.

Virtually all branches of the Christian church recognize the statements they produced as reflecting the teachings of the Scriptures.

c. Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q. 6: How many persons are there in the Godhead?

Answer: There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

Triune God = 3 Whos + 1 What
God the Father = 1 Who + 1 What
Jesus Christ = 2 Whos + 1 What
Holy Spirit = 1 Who + 1 What

4.3. Essential elements in the Doctrine of the Trinity

- The Bible teaches the unity of God.
- The Bible teaches the full deity of each of the three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- The Bible teaches the full personhood of the three persons.
- The Bible teaches that the Trinity is eternal (there have always been three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit).
- The Bible teaches that there are certain relations within the Godhead:

- The Son is eternally begotten of the Father (John 3:16).
- The Holy Spirit is eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son (John 15:26).

Thus the Son and the Spirit appear subordinate in their relationship to the Father, but are not subordinate in their essence. There is priority but not superiority (Jn. 5:19, 30; 14:28).

- The Bible teaches that each member of the Trinity has certain functions ascribed particularly to him:
 - Creation and election are primarily considered to be the work of the Father.
 - Redemption is primarily the work of the Son.
 - Application of the work of redemption and sanctification is primarily the work of the Spirit.
 - Nevertheless, each person of the Trinity participates in each of these areas.

4.3. Attempted analogies for the Trinity

Over the centuries people have tried to find illustrations or analogies to explain the Trinity. These include: a mathematical analogy: $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$; the shamrock: three leaves/one leaf (but the one leaf does not contain the other three...); an egg consists of yolk, white and shell, but forms one entity (but the three parts of an egg are not of the same essence); states of water: H_2O exists as solid (ice), liquid (water), and gas (water vapour), (a straightforward case of modalism); one actor who plays three roles (modalism); the man who is husband, father and doctor (modalism); Lover-Beloved-Love (modalism).

No analogy can really do the trinity justice because, ultimately, the human mind cannot fully grasp the mystery of it.

The analogies of the Trinity which ancient orthodox church fathers like Basil of Caesarea, his brother Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzus used to try to help people understand it was of the sun (it's flaming mass, the rays emanating from it, and its heat, all three of which are distinct yet of equal duration and inseparable from each other), or the colours in a rainbow (distinct yet inseparable from the rest of the rainbow).

5. **Why is the doctrine of the Trinity so important?**

5.1. It is essential for revelation

It is inconceivable that a created being could have revealed the uncreated eternal God.

a. God the Father was perfectly revealed by the Son

Without the incarnation the transcendent God would, ultimately, have remained a mystery – as he is for non-Christian religions.

Jn. 14:9, Jesus said about himself: *“He who has seen me has seen the Father.”*

b. The Spirit reveals the truth about the Father and the Son to the world

Jn. 14:16-17, *“I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive; for it does not see him, neither knows him.”*

Jn. 16:8-11, *“When he (the Holy Spirit) has come, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment; about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to my Father, and you will not see me anymore; about judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged.”*

5.1. It is vital for salvation

The doctrines of election, soteriology (doctrine of salvation), and pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit) will be looked at in depth later. Suffice it to say that this stage that:

a. God the Father elects unto salvation

Jn. 10:28-30, *“I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”*

Jn. 17:2, *“Even as you (God the father) gave him (Jesus, the Son) authority over all flesh, he (i.e., God the father) will give eternal life to all whom you (father) have given him (i.e. the Son).”*

1 Pet. 1:1-2, *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen ones who are living as foreigners... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...”*

b. God the Son effects salvation

Only if Jesus is fully God and fully man can his sacrifice for sin be sufficient for all. He had to be fully man in order to be able to substitute for man, and fully God for that sacrifice to be of limitless and eternal value.

1 Pet. 2:24, *“who (i.e. Jesus Christ) his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.”*

c. God the Spirit applies salvation

John 3:5-8, *“Jesus answered, ‘Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter into God’s Kingdom! That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’”*

Conclusion

The doctrine of the Trinity is not the product of theological speculation. It is revealed in Scriptures, though, ultimately the concept is incomprehensible.

Think of an insect in a royal palace. Everything it sees and hears is true, yet far beyond its little bug-brain’s ability to grasp. If a member of the royal family were to become a bug and, in limited bug-language, tried to explain something of the realm to which he belonged, the bug’s understanding might increase a bit, but it would still be hugely limited by virtue of its linguistic and conceptual limitations. So it is with the Trinity. Our conceptual and linguistic limitations prevent us from fully explaining it. If, in fact, we could fully understand it then the essence of God would have become understandable to the human mind – and he would cease to be an object of wonder and worship.

VIII

Creation

“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honor, and the power, for you created all things, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!” (Rev. 4:11)



1. How comprehensive is the explanatory power of modern science?

Science can explain many things. However, most philosophers agree that there are many things it cannot explain, even if you knew every scientific fact about them.

1.1. Moral truth

Science cannot establish what is right and what is wrong. For example, it cannot establish that rape is evil. It cannot determine how things ought to be as opposed to what just is. Science is descriptive, not prescriptive.

1.2. Historical truth

Science cannot prove events which took place in the past with scientific accuracy since they are not repeatable. Repeatability is essential to establishing scientific facts.

1.3. Consciousness

Science cannot explain the nature of self-awareness, of mind/soul/spirit.

1.4. Scientific laws

Science cannot explain why the laws of science are what they are. It cannot explain why nature is orderly, functioning according to laws such as Archimedes’ principle of buoyancy, Kepler’s laws of planetary motion, the laws of thermodynamics, etc. It can only explain *how* these laws function.

1.5. Logic

According to many philosophers, science cannot establish what the correct laws of logic might be. Laws of logic and mathematics exist independently of matter.

1.6. Experiential truth

Science cannot prove to you that your wife loves you or that your life has meaning.

1.7. Aesthetic truth

Science cannot tell you why certain things are considered beautiful by almost all people: like certain types of classical music, a cherry blossom, etc. The advertising industry recognizes that certain people are considered physically attractive across cultures and will pay them large amounts of money for their images.

1.8. Existence

Science cannot explain why there is something in the first place, rather than nothing at all.

1.9. Significance

Science cannot explain the human need for love, meaning and a sense of purpose.

1.10. Certain first-person experiences

Science cannot explain what it is like to eat food you have never tasted, or what it is like to be a wombat, to give a few trivial examples. In other words, it cannot explain things in a dimension outside our own experience.

1.11. Miracles

Science cannot prove—or disprove—miracles, supernatural activity, or supernatural beings.

1.12. Free will

Science cannot establish whether or not we have a free will.

2. What does the Bible teach about the creator of the universe?

The doctrine of creation is important for it affects our view of reality by answering fundamental worldview questions such as, “where did the universe come from?”, “where did humanity come from?” and “is there a purpose behind the universe?”

2.1. The Bible teaches that God existed before the natural world, and that the natural world derives its existence from him

God is totally self-sufficient, and does not need creation or mankind.

Gen. 1:1, *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”*

Ac. 17:25, *“Neither is he (God) served by men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself gives to all life and breath, and all things.”*

2.2. The Bible teaches that creation was a free act of God

God brought the entire universe (spiritual and material) into being by his will through an act of pure, spiritual power.

Rev. 4:11, "*You (God) created all things, and because of your will they existed, and were created.*"

The reality from which all other realities derive is the divine command.

2.3. The Bible teaches that God created everything in the natural world out of nothing (*ex nihilo* in Latin)

Instead of the term *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) some prefer the phrase "creation *par verbum*" (creation by the word). The implications are the same.

Psa. 33:6-9, "*By Yahweh's word, the heavens were made; all their army by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap. He lays up the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear Yahweh. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spoke, and it was done. He commanded, and it stood firm.*"

Psa. 90:2, "*Before the mountains were born, before you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.*"

Heb. 11:3, "*By faith, we understand that the universe has been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not been made out of things which are visible.*"

Jn. 1:3, "*All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made.*"

Before God's first creative act nothing material existed. By an act of pure spiritual power God brought into being both the matter and the energy which together make up the substance of the universe.

Since nothing existed beforehand, then God's creative act also brought into being the laws of the material universe.

Creation *ex nihilo* is important because:

1. If anything existed before God began creating, then God is not the only eternal being. The result is a dualistic system.
2. The fact that God created all things as an act of his will suggests that he acted with purpose. The existence of the world (and our own existence) is not a matter of chance but of purpose. This gives meaning to life.
3. Pantheism denies *ex nihilo*. Pantheism hold that everything is God, that all reality is identical with God.
4. Panentheist theology denies *ex nihilo*. Panentheists hold that all things are absorbed in God.

a. He created time itself

This is difficult to understand, but time is related to matter. Time is not an eternal element of reality. God himself is outside of time, not limited by it.

2 Pet. 3:8, *“With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”*

As we will see later, this has huge implications for such doctrines as election and the nature of God’s sovereignty.

b. He created the spiritual/angelic world

Col. 1:16, *“For by him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and for him.”*

c. He created life

Neh. 9:6, *“You are Yahweh, even you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their army, the earth and all things that are on it, the seas and all that is in them, and you preserve them all. The army of heaven worships you.”*

Ac. 17:25, *“Neither is he (God) served by men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself gives to all life and breath, and all things.”*

2.4. God is distinct from his creation, involved but separate.

He organises, controls, evaluates and gives purpose. The universe is not panentheistic (i.e. the idea that God penetrates every part of the universe but also needs it for his own existence).

2.5. All three persons of the Trinity were involved in the acts of creation

a. God in the totality of his being

Gen. 1:1, *“In the beginning God (i.e. elohim)...”*

Isa. 44:24, *“Yahweh, your Redeemer, and he who formed you from the womb says: “I am Yahweh, who makes all things; who alone stretches out the heavens; who spreads out the earth by myself.”*

Heb. 11:3, *“By faith, we understand that the universe has been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not been made out of things which are visible.”*

b. God the Father

1 Cor. 8:6, *"Yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we live through him."*

c. God the Son

1 Cor. 8:6. See above

Col. 1:16, *"For by him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and for him."*

Jn. 1:3, *"All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made."*

Heb. 1:1-2, *"God, having in the past spoken to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² has at the end of these days spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds."*

d. God the Holy Spirit

Gen. 1:1-2, *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was on the surface of the deep and God's Spirit was hovering (or "brooding") over the surface of the waters."*

The word "hovering" can be understood as just being there and doing nothing. It can, however, also be understood as having an active meaning, similar to brooding. In other words, like a chicken brooding over eggs so that new life will be born, the Spirit brooded over creation. If that is a correct understanding then the Spirit was involved in creating life on earth.

2.6. There are two creation narratives in Genesis 1-3.

Chapter 1:1-2:3 tells of the creation of all things with humanity as the climax.

Chapter 2:4-25 retells some of the creation, but with respect to the relation of YHWH (God's OT covenant name) to humanity. It appears to be told from a more local, "human observer" point of view.

3. What do the creation narratives teach about humanity?

3.1. They were formed by God out of the dust of the earth as the high point of his creative work

They are physical. Although the rest of creation came into being *ex nihilo*, people were created from what God had already made. The same designer decided to use existing raw matter to create something new.

Gen. 2:7, 22, "Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul... Yahweh God made a woman from the rib which had taken from the man, and brought her to the man."

3.2. They were created as male and female

Throughout Genesis 1-3, the word "man" is the translation of the Hebrew word *adam*, a generic term for humanity (1:27). Different words are used for male (1:27) and husband (2:23b, 24).

The relationship of husband and wife was designed not only for reproduction (1:28) but also for companionship, sexual enjoyment (2:24), mutual support (2:18, 24) and delight (2:23, 25).

The man/woman relationship was a harmonious interpersonal relationship, with equality in personhood and importance, but different in roles and authority. See also 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:21-23.

"Helper", the term used to describe the woman's role, (2:18) does not mean a subordinate assistant. The word is used elsewhere of God himself.

Ps. 115:9-11, "Israel, trust in Yahweh! He is their help and their shield. House of Aaron, trust in Yahweh! He is their help and their shield. You who fear Yahweh, trust in Yahweh! He is their help and their shield."

Deut. 33:7, "You (Lord) shall be a help against his adversaries."

In Gen. 1:28 the man and woman are jointly addressed as a single humanity with shared responsibility.

3.3. They were created "in the image of God"

They shared in a limited sense the perfections of God's character (Gen. 1:26-27). They were created to live in obedience to God (1:28; 2:16-17). They were able to receive communication from God (1:28-30; 2:15-17). They were creative (2:15), moral (16-17), social (18), and intelligent (20).

They were created with a spiritual dimension not shared by the rest of creation.

We will reflect more on this truth when we look at anthropology, the doctrine of man.

3.4. They are of great value to God

God is fundamentally of good will towards man (1.28a), though their disobedience led them into a position of falling under his judgment. In spite of this, God provided a way back into his “good graces” at tremendous cost to himself, so that his own righteousness would not be compromised (see Chapter XIII).

3.5. They were not allowed to seek equality with God

They were not allowed to know the nature of evil by personal experience.

Gen. 2:17, “*You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*”

3.6. They were given the responsibility of ruling over and caring for the rest of creation (1:28; 2:15, 19-20),

They were to be stewards not plunderers. Note too that work predates the fall.

4. What do the creation narratives teach about the natural world?

4.1. That God created it in an ordered sequence

He created it from formless (1:2) to formed (days 1 to 3, 1:3-13), and then to fullness (days 4 to 6, 1:14-31). Note also the parallels of Day 1 with Day 4; Day 2 with Day 5; Day 3 with Day 6.

He designed and created it step by step by his command. Note the repetition of “*God said, Let there be ...*” in the creation narratives.

He created it as a balanced system with variety (1:11-12, 20-21, 24-25; 2:9) and beauty (2:12).

He created it to be ordered to reflect his faithfulness, yet flexible enough to allow his ongoing involvement.

Psa. 148:5, “*Let them praise Yahweh’s name, For he commanded, and they were created.*”

Christians differ on whether “days” in Genesis 1 are strictly periods of 24 hours. The rest of the Bible assumes that Genesis 1-3 gives a true account of the origin of the world.

4.2. That God took pleasure in it

“*He saw it was good,*” (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 22, 25, 31).

4.3. That God created living things with the ability to reproduce themselves

Separation, one thing being distinct from another “*according to their kind*”, is an essential part of the created order (1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18). This led to disaster for humanity after the fall, inasmuch as Adam and Eve’s descendants were reproduced in their parents’ image.

Gen. 5:3, “*Adam lived one hundred thirty years, and became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.*”

The ability to reproduce is one of the things which set mankind apart from the angelic world.

4.4. The Genesis account of creation rules out polytheism, pantheism, atheism, or deism.

5. Why did God create the universe?

God did not create the universe because he had need of it. God does not need anything. He is totally self-sufficient, and does not need creation or mankind. It was a decision he took. He willed it, and it happened.

But why? Genesis does not explain God’s motive for creating the world, but we can see the effect that the creation of the universe has: it displays something of the glory of God and is an expression of his love (see 6.1).

Psa. 19:1-3, “*The heavens declare the glory of God. The expanse shows his handiwork. Day after day they pour out speech, and night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.*”

Rom. 1:20, “*The invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse.*”

Rev 4:11, “*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honor, and the power, for you created all things, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!*”

“It seems that God created the universe to take delight in his creation, for as creation shows forth various aspects of God’s character, to that extent he takes delight in it.”
Grudem, 271-2

6. Why did God create human beings?

We shall look more closely at humanity later, but for the moment we will connect this question to the previous one. We find our answer in Genesis chapters one and two.

6.1. For the purpose of relating to them

God is a relational being, and he made human beings to relate to him. From the beginning we see God's desire for communion and fellowship with man. He sought Adam *"in the garden in the cool of the day"* (Gen. 3:8).

The whole history of redemption is the unfolding of God's plan to restore his fellowship with fallen, sinful man (Isa. 59:1,2). In Christ that relationship is fully restored: we see God once again in ongoing fellowship with people through the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:16-20, 23).

6.2. To reflect his own character

God created humanity *"in his own image"* (Gen. 1:27). He wants them to look like him in terms of their nature and character. He wants us to *"partake of the divine nature* (2 Peter 1:4-7), *conformed to the image of His Son* (Rom. 8:28-29), *and led by His Spirit* (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4).

People also participate in God's communicable attributes as objects of his love, mercy, justice, wrath, etc.

6.3. To rule over creation

God made human beings to act as his regents over creation. He invited them to, as it were, join the family business. They were designed to have dominion (Gen. 1:28), i.e., to rule over the world and to look after it.

Originally man's only rival was Satan—and mankind lost the battle for rulership in his first encounter with him (Gen. 3). However, God's will will always be accomplished: when Christ returns that is exactly what will happen: a human, Christ the God-man, will rule the world and care for it!

6.4. To reproduce

God told Adam and Eve to *"be fruitful and multiply"* (the only command mankind has obeyed!). Adam and Eve were designed to multiply *"after their kind"*.

Gen. 5:3, *"Adam lived one hundred thirty years, and became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth."*

As already noted, this led to disaster after the fall, which led to the necessity of the *"new birth"*: people being *"born again"*, becoming children of God by redemption and then reproducing *"after their kind"*.

The NT exhorts us to “be fruitful” and records that Jesus’ disciples “multiplied”.

Jn. 15:16, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.*”

Col. 1:10, “*...bearing fruit in every good work.*”

Ac. 6:1, 7, “*Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying... The word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly.*”

7. How should we view the physical world?

If God made the material world, then it is good. Note how that affirmation is repeated in Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31. This means we should avoid two extremes.

7.1. Don’t take too negative a stance vis-a-vis the physical world

Despite the distortions caused by sin, this is still God’s creation and he is still in control. As C.S. Lewis put it, “God likes matter: he invented it!”²⁵ Hence we should not think that only the spiritual aspect of life matters.

An overly negative view of the physical world can lead people to asceticism: abstaining from things that God has given us to enjoy by punishing our bodies physically and trying to escape from the material world through extreme forms of self-deprivation, meditation and/or trances. This view of the body is a remnant of neo-platonic thought which denigrated the material/physical side of reality.

The apostle Paul had to resist asceticism in several NT churches and he expresses a positive view of God’s creation:

1 Tim. 4:4-5, “*For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified through the word of God and prayer.*”

The natural world is to be looked after. A Christian perspective gives a proper appreciation of the world and the human body, a sense of stewardship of its resources, a clear recognition of its limitations, and also a thankful life within it to the glory of God the Creator.

Francis Schaeffer’s book *Pollution and the Death of Man*, is a brief and helpful statement on the Christian and ecology.

²⁵ C. S. Lewis, 2001. *Mere Christianity*, San Francisco: HarperOne (2001), 64.

7.2. Don't be too positive

The material world comes from God, but is not itself divine. Because it has been affected by sin, it should not be over-valued. It must not be worshipped. Our ultimate loyalty must be to God Himself.

Sin has negatively affected the natural world as well.

Rom. 8:19-22, "For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now."

9. **How does the doctrine of creation relate to the theory of evolution?**

Western educational systems assume that the theory of evolution is true. This, of course, has had a huge impact on us personally as well as on the people we evangelise. It has had a huge effect on people's attitudes to the Bible, the Christian faith, as well as on various social, economic and ecological issues.

In the popular media Christians are often perceived as being ignorant and bigoted while the evolutionist's position is scientific and, somehow, "proven". This is too simplistic.

8.1. Clarifying our terms

- a. Science: a systematic advance in knowledge of the physical (i.e. material) universe *gained through observation and experimentation*. As seen at the beginning of this chapter, there are huge areas of human experience which science is simply not qualified to address because the events were one-off, unrepeatable historical happenings which cannot be replicated in a laboratory.
- b. Creationist: someone who believes that a personal God created the universe.
- c. Evolutionist: someone who believes that the diversity of life on earth is the outcome of impersonal, unpredictable, natural selection processes.
- d. Macro-evolution: the idea that over long periods of time all life forms descended from some simple, one-cell organism through such mechanisms as mutation, genetic drift, and natural selection.

- e. Micro-evolution: the adaptation of a particular species to their environment. For example, a population of toads may in some circumstances change colour, but they remain toads; or a particular kind of insect may develop a resistance to an insecticide, but they remain that particular kind of insect.

Micro-evolution is easily observed. Macro-evolution has not been observed. No creationist denies micro-evolution, but arguments against creation often confuse the two. A case of micro-evolution is put forward as being so obvious as to make the creationist appear to be stubbornly denying known facts.

- f. Theistic evolutionists: someone who believes that the present world came about over a long period of time through the process of evolution after God created the initial material and set up the laws of nature. God then let the process run on its own, though he may have intervened at a few critical points in the evolutionary process. In other words, he is the source of the "Big Bang", may have created the simplest forms of life, and may have created the soul, spirit and sense of morality in human beings.
- g. Intelligent design: the idea that order and complexity in the many branches of nature indicate that they were designed by an intelligent creator.

<p>"The world embarrasses me. I cannot think that this watch exists and has no watch maker." Voltaire</p>
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- h. Irreducible complexity: A concept put forward as evidence of intelligent design. It holds that each part of a system must be in place for the other parts to have any value. For example, a wing needs feathers, and an ear needs an inner ear. The removal of any part of the system would lead to it ceasing to function.

Put another way, the development of any part without connecting instantly to all the other parts which make up the whole means that the species would have devolved and be less likely to survive.

See *Intelligent Design* by Michael Behe, who also authored *Darwin's Black Box* (1996. New York: Touchstone).

- i. Neo-Darwinism: a popular term which refers to version(s) of evolutionary theory which seek to integrate aspects of contemporary science, such as genetics and molecular biology, into the model.

A number of neo-evolutionists, like Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, launched powerful attacks on creationism. See, for example, the website of the *National Center for Science Education* (NCSE).

“Natural selection, the unconscious, automatic, blind yet essentially non-random process (note the logical contradiction) that Darwin discovered, has no purpose in mind. If it can be said to play the role of watchmaker in nature, it is the *blind* watchmaker” (Dawkins, 1996, 5).

- j. Young earth creationists: those who hold that the world was created with the appearance of age.²⁶ The Genesis account tells us that God created fully functioning creatures (in other words, God created chickens, not eggs). It also holds that some of the main geographic features are the result of huge catastrophic cataclysms which struck the earth in ancient times.

Just as Adam and Eve were not created as zygotes but as mature adults, God created the earth in a mature form: in an instant God completed processes that now take a very long time. The earth could only be between 10,000 or 20,000 years old.

Young earthers can marshal their own body of evidence, including such things as the fact that the thin dust layers on the moon and planets suggests they are pretty young, as does the salinity of the oceans. This, they maintain, shows that there were no long processes: God created instantly. Furthermore, time is relative—it can speed up or slow down. In other words, the entire creation process could have taken place (“evolved”) at high speed.

For apologetic articles from a creationist young earth perspective see these websites:

- www.answersingenesis.org/
- <http://www.christiananswers.net/creation/aqoo/home.html>

- k. Old-earth creationists: those who hold that the universe is very old.

Some old earth creationists see a length of time, a gap, in Genesis One between verses 1 and 2. If the Spirit of God hovered over the waters, there was already an earth of some sort before God started creating other things. Maybe the earth was already very old at that stage, during which period it was subject to time and thus to change.

²⁶ When anything appears at any stage it has the appearance of age, i.e., of having some kind of history which led it that particular point of development.

Furthermore, the word “day” in Hebrew (*yom*) can mean anything from a single day to an unspecified period of time (as in, “on the day you eat thereof you will die” (Gen. 2:4) to an age. In Genesis the word does not have to mean 24 hours, because the moon and stars and the measuring of days was not there at the beginning, so a day could mean a longer period of time.

For apologetic articles from an old-earth creationist perspective see:

- <http://www.reasons.org>
- Hugh Ross, *Why The Universe Is The Way It Is*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2008.

8.3. Questions with respect to the various theories

a. Questions young-earth creationists typically face

- Where did God come from?
- How do we explain the fossil and geological record?
- Do the two accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 contradict?
- How do you decide when to accept the views of scientists and when not? (On the other hand, more and more scientists today are realizing the limits of their respective fields).
- Is any of Genesis 1-3 figurative? e.g. the tree of life, the devil appearing as a serpent. If so, why not see other parts as figurative?

b. Questions evolutionists typically face

- What exploded in the first place to make the Big Bang?
- How could the first living cell have come about by chance? Too many actions have to take place simultaneously.
- DNA is a complex information system. Where did it come from?
- What happened to all the supposed missing links? Where are the intermediate or transitional types?
- We do not see macro-evolution taking place today. Why?
- How can order arise from mindless chaos?
- A small genetic change adds no advantage – and may even create a disadvantage – so how can it be maintained by natural selection?
- Where does morality come from?
- If everything that exists came about by chance, what reason do we have to expect any order? If there is no order, how can we depend on scientific processes?
- How do you explain that for certain features to give a living organism an advantage it would have to evolve through stages which would put it at a great disadvantage first? (i.e., the argument or irreducible complexity)

c. Questions old earth creationists and theistic evolutionists typically face

- Were Adam and Eve real people? If so, how and when did they become different from previous non-human ancestors? If not, why did Jesus and the NT writers speak of them as if they were real?

“These are the generations of ...” introduces genealogies of real people. It also introduces the genealogy of Adam (Gen. 2:4).

- OT references presume a historic six day creation:

Ex. 20:10, *“In six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them.”*

- NT references require Adam and Eve to be historic people and the act of creation a historic event: death reigned from Adam to Moses (Rom. 5:14). Jesus is described as the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) and conversion is compared to a second creation (2 Cor. 4:6).
- Was there an historic fall into sin? Is Adam really the federal head of the human race? If so, when in the process of evolution did he become so? If not, how did sin, suffering and death enter the world? Did God make the world like that? Or did it just evolve like that?
- How could there be (pre-)human death prior to the fall?
- Or, if there was no historic fall, how can the NT contrast it with the historic work of Christ in redemption, as in Romans 5?
- How do you decide when to accept the Bible as historical and factual and when not to?
- How do you decide when to accept the views of scientists and when not to?
- There is a conflict between the Bible’s insistence on purposeful creation and evolution’s dependence on chance. The vast majority of steps in an evolutionary process failed (purportedly based on the survival of the fittest), so could not be described as good.
- Every purposeful intervention by God conflicts with evolution’s insistence on random mutation.

Once an Arab and a secular scientist were travelling together in the desert. After the Bedouin said his prayers the scientist asked how he could be sure there was a God.

“How do I know that a man and not a camel passed by our tent last night?” the Arab asked.

“Because of the footprints in the sand,” came the answer.

“I see God’s footprints in the things he has created: in the sun, the moon, the stars, and in all of nature around us,” the Arab responded with finality.

9. If God created the universe, does he continue to show an interest in it? Is he still involved in his creation?

9.1. Non-biblical views of God's involvement with/in the world

a. The atheist: there is no God

God did not make the material universe and is not involved in it. It is uncreated, is independent of any act of will and has no ultimate purpose.

b. The pantheist: all is God

God is one with and indivisible from the universe, or the world is the external appearance of the internal life-giving deity. This is the belief of Buddhists and also influences New Age philosophy.

This is also the assumed position of many western philosophies and theologies which draw their inspiration from Spinoza and Hegel: God realizing himself in nature; God and nature are of one and the same essence.

c. The panentheist: "all-in-God-ism"

Although the world is distinct from God, it is "in" him. Panentheism is sometimes described as God being the "soul" of the universe. As things in the world/universe change, mature, grow, they also affect God. In other words, events and changes in the universe impact God in such a way that he too increases in knowledge and being. God is subject to the temporal.

This way of thinking is closely associated with the process theology of Charles Harsthorne and John B.Cobb. It holds that the only constant in the universe is change, and that God changes as he responds to the changing universe.

d. The dualist: God and the material universe have eternally co-existed

There is a continuing struggle between the spiritual and the material, between good and evil. This was a view held by ancient Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, and you can see it portrayed in the *Star Wars* films and in the *Harry Potter* books.

Some forms of spiritual warfare teaching border on a dualist view of reality: the work of God hangs in the balance, and it can go either way.

e. The deist: God created the universe, but is transcendent and uninvolved in the creation

The popular notion of God as a divine watchmaker who set the mechanism of the universe in motion, but left it to its own devices after that is deistic.

“Many ‘lukewarm’ or nominal Christians today are, in effect, practical deists, since they live lives almost totally devoid of genuine prayer, worship, fear of God, or moment-by-moment trust in God to care for needs that arise”.

Grudem, 270-271.

9.2. Biblical view: God is both transcendent and immanent

a. God is not part of creation, but is continuously involved in creation.

God is both transcendent (i.e. far above] and immanent (i.e. remaining in”) creation. In other words, he is distinct from, independent of and thus separate from creation, but he is nevertheless present everywhere and is actively involved in creation.

b. God holds the whole universe together

God actively keeps the universe going from moment to moment. He holds it together, he sustains it, and is involved with all that happens in creation. God keeps the world going from moment to moment.

Job 12:10, *“In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.”* (NIV)

Psa. 104:27-30, *“These all wait for you that you may give them their food in due season. You give to them; they gather. You open your hand; they are satisfied with good. You hide your face: they are troubled; you take away their breath: they die, and return to the dust. You send out your Spirit and they are created. You renew the face of the ground.”*

Isa. 42:5, *“Thus says God Yahweh, he who created the heavens and stretched them out, he who spread out the earth and that which comes out of it, he who gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk in it.”*

The following two verses speak about this in relation to the second person of the Trinity.

Col. 1:17, *“He (God) is before all things, and in him all things are held together.”*

Heb. 1:3, *“His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power.”*

The Triune God is the unifying principle of the cosmos.

c. There is no life without God's "breath"

The Bible teaches that no animal and no human being can live without God actively giving life and keeping it alive. Every living being has the breath of God, or the spirit of God. This is not the Holy Spirit; the same Hebrew word *ruah* means both spirit and breath. This spirit, this breath of God, is totally dependent on God. It is God who sustains life inside of every living being.

Job 12:10, *"In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind"*. (NIV)

Job 34:14-15, *"If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust."* (NIV)

Ac. 17:25, 28, *"Neither is he (God) served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself gives to all life and breath, and all things.... For in him we live, and move, and have our being."*

9.3. The doctrine of divine providence

Divine providence is God's active involvement in his world. It refers to the care that God takes of all existing things, his continued activity in his universe by which he sustains all his creatures, his involvement with all that happens in creation, and the fact that he directs all things according to his ultimate purposes, notably his own glory and the good of his people.

God did not create the world and then allow it to continue on its own (Deism). Psa. 104 gives us a sense of the active involvement of God in the daily processes of nature. It is a beautiful poetic description of God at work in which the psalmist is overwhelmed by God's continuous involvement in nature. Beyond the immediate natural explanations, he sees God at work. God, who made everything in the first place, is still looking after his creation from moment to moment. See also Psa. 139.

Do we still have this sense of God's intimate involvement with His creation? This too is part of common grace.

The doctrines of creation and providence are closely connected: since God is personal, wise and good, he will act in a rational way, with the interests of his creatures at heart. Since he is omnipotent, he can be relied upon to accomplish his purposes.

Mat. 10:29, *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Not one of them falls on the ground apart from your Father's will."*

a. Divine providence and humanity (the nations)

God deals with the peoples of the world, the nations, according to specific criteria.

(1) The Abrahamic Covenant

This was unconditional covenant God made with Abraham which stated, among other things, that those who blessed Abraham's descendants would be blessed and those who cursed them would be cursed.

Gen. 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

(2) God allows each nation a certain measure of evil

Once the "cup of iniquity is full" that nation will fall under judgement.

Gen. 15:13-16, "He (God) said to Abram, "Know for sure that your offspring will live as foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them. They will afflict them four hundred years. I will also judge that nation, whom they will serve... In the fourth generation they will come here again, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full."

Amos 3:6, "Does the trumpet alarm sound in a city, without the people being afraid? Does disaster happen to a city, and Yahweh has not done it?"

See also the book of Nahum.

(3) Pride

Isa. 10:8, 12, "It is in his heart (i.e. the king of Assyria) to destroy, and to cut off not a few nations. For he says, "Are not all of my princes kings?... Therefore it will happen that, when the Lord has performed his whole work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the wilful proud heart of the king of Assyria, and the insolence of his haughty looks."

Isa. 2:11-12, 17, "The lofty looks of man will be brought low, the haughtiness of men will be bowed down, and Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day. For there will be a day of Yahweh of Armies for all that is proud and haughty, and for all that is lifted up; and it shall be brought low... The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; and Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day."

Isa. 37:26, "Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone."

Isa. 40:23-24, *“He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.”*

Ob. 1:3-4, regarding Edom: *“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high, who says in his heart, ‘Who will bring me down to the ground?’ Though you mount on high as the eagle, and though your nest is set among the stars, I will bring you down from there, says Yahweh.”*

See also Ob. 1:10-13.

b. Divine providence with respect to God’s covenant people

God’s providence with respect to his covenant people involves both blessings and discipline. He uses the big events of history for the eternal good of his own, chosen, covenant people.

Examples from the OT

- Gen. 50:20, Joseph to his brothers, *“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is today, to save many people alive.”*
- The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (Ex. 7 and 8).
- Absalom following false advice (2 Sam. 17:14).
- Rehoboam’s foolish decision leading to the division of Israel (1 Kings 12:15).
- Assyria in Isaiah 10: compare verses 6 with 7-11; and 12 with 13-14.
- God’s rule over the nations in Amos 1-4 and especially 3:6 and 9:7.
- Jer. 27:1-7 predicts the defeat of Israel and the surrounding nations by Babylon. Only Edom heeded his call and switched sides to ally itself with Babylon. Its cruelties against Israel as a Babylonian ally are decried in Obadiah and Psa. 137.
- The Babylonian Exile (Jer. 32:42-44), which Jeremiah predicted would last exactly 70 years (Je. 25:11, 12; 29:10), after which a king name Cyrus would restore Israel (Isa. 44:28).
- The fall of the Babylonian empire (Jer. 50-51).
- What or who makes someone rich? Compare Prov. 10:4 with 10:22.
- What was the gift of the prophets? Was it merely to foretell future events that were still unknown to the rest of mankind?

You cannot read far in the prophetic books before you see that, through them, God was declaring in advance what he had determined to do.

- Am. 4:6-13 is a very moving passage about seeing God's hand in judgment.

Examples from the NT

- Rom. 8:28, *"We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose."*
- Eph. 1:11, *"In him we were also chosen having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will."* (NIV)

10. How do God's providence and evil relate to each other?

The Biblical authors did not view people as robots acting out the will of God with no will or responsibility of their own in the matter. They affirmed human freedom, responsibility and accountability, as well as the concepts of divine providence and sovereignty. They recognized a synergism taking place. They could, in fact, place the reality of men's evil deeds and the plans God carried out through those very deeds side by side. They recognized that although evil does not flow from God's hands, the good that comes from it does.

Lk. 22:22, *"The Son of Man indeed goes, as it has been determined, but woe to that man through whom he is betrayed!"*

Ac. 2:23, *"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."* (NIV)

Ac. 4:27-28, *"In this city against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever your hand and your council foreordained to happen."*

Example from the life of Paul:

Ac. 27:23-25; 30-31, *"Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me... In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved."* (NIV)

Conclusion: The doctrine of divine providence is a source of great confidence for Christians for it means that the God who made heaven and earth cares for and helps me as I love him and seek to walk according to his purposes!

Psa. 121:2, “My help comes from Yahweh, who made heaven and earth.”

Psa. 124:8, “Our help is in Yahweh’s name, who made heaven and earth.”

Col. 1:24, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the assembly”

When Satan rebelled against God and carried the host of fallen angels, now demons, with him to eternal ruin, God could have crushed the rebellion and annihilated Satan and his hosts forever. That would have been just and reasonable. It might even have been merciful; for if God had gone on to create Adam and Eve, as he had no doubt determined to do beforehand, Satan would not have been there to tempt them, the pair would not have fallen, and sin and death would not have passed upon the race.

But this would not have shown God’s ‘manifold wisdom’. It would have shown his power and perhaps even his mercy. But it would not have shown that God’s way, the way of truth and righteousness, is the only really good way and the only sure path to happiness.

So instead of annihilating Satan, God took an entirely different path: “I have already determined to create a race called man, and I know in advance, because I know all things, that Satan will seduce him from my righteousness and plunge him into misery. Satan will think he has won. But while Satan is doing that – turning the human race against me and setting individual human beings against one another and even against themselves – I will begin to create a new people who will glory in doing what is right, even when it is not popular, and who will delight in pleasing me, even when they suffer for it. Satan will say, “Your people serve you only because you protect them, only because you provide for them materially.” But here and there in a great variety of ways I will allow them to be greatly abused and persecuted, and I will show by their reactions that not only will they continue to praise me in their suffering, and thus bring glory to my name, but that they will even be happier in their suffering than Satan’s people will be with their maximum share of human prestige and possessions.

So God let history unfold like a great drama upon a cosmic stage. The angels are the audience. We are the actors. Satan is there to do everything he can to resist and thwart God’s purposes. The drama unfolds across the centuries as Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and all the other *dramatis personae* of Christian history, both the great persons and the minor persons, are brought on stage to play the part God has assigned them and to speak words that come from hearts that love him...

Now you and I are the players in this drama. Satan is attacking, and the angels are straining forward to look on. Are they seeing the ‘manifold wisdom’ of God in you as you go through your part and speak your lines? They must see it, for it can be seen in you alone. It is there – where you work and play and think and speak – that the meaning and end of history is found.

James Montgomery Boice. *Ephesians*, p. 105-106

IX

Humanity

*“LORD, what is man, that you care for him?
Or the son of man, that you think of him?” (Psalm 144:3)*



1. Are human beings in a different category from animals?

People differ from animals either in degree or in absolute terms in such areas as:

- their moral nature
- their capacity to reflect on life, death and eternity (able to philosophize)
- their capacity to reason (with its consequences in science, technology, ideology)
- their capacity to use abstract language
- their creativity
- their self-awareness
- their amazing intellectual curiosity

2. Where do these fundamental differences come from?

2.1. The Bible teaches that people were created “in God’s image”

Gen. 1:26-27, “God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in his own image. In God’s image he created him; male and female he created them.”

Gen. 5:1-3, “In the day that God created man, he made him in God’s likeness. He created them male and female, and blessed them. On the day they were created, he named them “Adam”. Adam lived one hundred thirty years, and became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.”

Gen. 9:6, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in his own image.”

Jam. 3:9-10, *"You have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of his Creator."*

The NT uses the Greek equivalents of both image and likeness to express the idea that Christians are being remade into the image and likeness of God.

Col. 3:9-10, *"You have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of his Creator."*

Eph. 4:23-24, *"You be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth."*

Jam. 3:9, *"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness."*

2.2. "Created in the image of God" is a multi-dimensional concept

In its fullest sense it refers to what man was prior to the fall.

- a. Morally: the original couple was sinless.
- b. Intellectually/mentally: they could reason. They had the ability to think, reflect and draw conclusions. They had the power of abstract thought and language, giving them the ability to share and pass on knowledge.
- c. They were given dominion: they were given the task of ruling over creation as God's vassals, along with all the capacities necessary to exercise proper stewardship of the earth.

Note that Gen. 1:27 moves immediately from the image-of-God concept to ruling over the rest of creation.

- d. They were spiritual beings: they were able to relate personally to God, who is a personal, spiritual being.
- e. They shared all the communicative attributes of God, though not in an absolute sense.

If you were to extrapolate everything that is good in human beings to the ultimate degree you would end up with a long list of divine attributes: love, joy, mercy, justice, wrath at evil, etc.

"Man is patterned on God! He was made to represent God – in created, human form".
Ferguson 1987, 30.

2.3. The result of this God-given image is that humanity is unique

- in our ability and need to relate to God.
- in our God-given task of managing creation.
- in our ability to build and pass on culture, society, civilizations.

3. How has the Fall into sin affected the image of God in humanity?

The Fall spoiled mankind in every way: morally, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Although something of the image of God in mankind was retained, it was permanently marred, for his righteousness was lost.

Now the image of God in man is only seen perfectly in Jesus Christ.

Col. 1:15, *“Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation”*

Heb. 1:3, *“His (i.e. God the Father’s) Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance.”*

We are jumping ahead, but in speaking of salvation the NT teaches that the image of God in man, which was destroyed by the Fall, is being restored into the image of Christ Jesus. This restoration is progressive and incomplete in this life but will be completed at the end of this life or of this world (see chapter XVII).

2 Cor. 3:18, *“But we all, with unveiled face seeing the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are transformed into the same image [as that of Christ].”*

1 Jn. 3:2, *“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him [i.e. Christ]; for we will see him just as he is.”*

Think of fallen mankind as a cathedral on which a bomb has fallen. You can still see what its original purpose was, but it cannot anymore serve that for which it was designed and built.

4. What are some of the practical consequences of mankind being created in the image of God?

Firstly, all of mankind stands equal as sinners before God and in need of his grace.

Secondly, this should affect Christian thinking on such subjects as race, mental and physical handicaps, abortion and euthanasia.

The Bible instituted the death penalty based on the fact that people are created in the image of God.

Gen. 10:6, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in his own image.”

“Every single human being, no matter how much the image of God is marred by sin, or illness, or weakness, or age, or any other disability, still has the status of being in God’s image and therefore must be treated with dignity and respect that is due to God’s image-bearer... People of every race deserve equal dignity and rights... If we ever deny our unique status in creation as God’s only image-bearers, we will soon begin to depreciate the value of human life, will tend to see humans as merely a higher form of animal, and will begin to treat others as such. We will also lose much of our sense of meaning in life.”
Grudem, p. 450.

5. What elements make up the human being?

A human being has many constituent parts, and we use many words to describe the different aspects: heart, mind, soul, will, brain, spirit, emotions, a complex body with many parts, conscience, feeling, etc.

The meaning of some of these words (like body) is clear. However, many people are vague about the meaning of the other concepts and how they might be categorized.

5.1. Materialistic monism

Denies that there is any immaterial or spiritual element to man which will survive the death of the body. There is nothing immortal. When your body dies it’s all over.

Secular people try to comfort each other in bereavement by saying that the dead person “will live on in our memories.” But this is playing with words: to live on in someone else’s memory is not to live at all.

5.2. Biblical terms: body, soul, spirit

Most people throughout history recognise that there is more to human beings than their bodies. The non-corporeal part of humans is described with words like “soul” and “spirit”. But these are quite difficult to define and to relate to other aspects of our inner being, such as conscience, will, emotion, and mind.

The Bible uses four terms when describing the makeup of humans:

ruach (Hebrew)/*pneuma* (Greek) = spirit.
nephesh (Hebrew)/*psyche* (Greek) = soul.
beten or *geshem* (Hebrew)/*soma* (Greek) = body
leb (Hebrew) / *kardia* (Greek) = heart

The OT Hebrew words for “spirit” and “soul”, *ruach* and *nephesh*, are often used interchangeably [to trace which one is used where in English you need a literal translation like the NASB.]

In the OT the word *leb* (heart) is not used for the pump which pushes blood around the body (though it is that too). It is used extensively to describe the inner man, the will, the emotional, rational aspects of mankind. It is an idiom used to describe the whole of a person’s invisible self.

The Bible sometimes speaks of people as a body and soul:

Mat. 10:28, *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.”*

Sometimes it speaks of them as body (flesh) and spirit:

2 Cor. 7:1, *“Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit.”*

And sometimes as body, soul and spirit:

1 Thes. 5:23, *“May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Heb. 4:12, *“For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit.”*

5.3. Is man a dichotomy or a trichotomy?

a. Dichotomy

Holds that people consist of two parts, a body and their non-corporeal selves. Dichotomists treat soul and spirit either as two words for the same thing, or as the spiritual aspect or capacity of the soul which enables relationship with God.

This position is held by many theologians, including Louis Berkhof and Wayne Grudem, who present many OT references to show that the words “soul” and “spirit” are used interchangeably. The problem with this line of arguing is that the OT is more of a historical narrative and prophetic warnings pertaining to Israel’s failure to live up to its covenant obligations. The later prophets, however, looked forward to an era when God would put a “new spirit” in the hearts of the covenant community.

Ezek. 11:19, *“I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh...”*

See also Ezek. 36:26.

b. Trichotomy

The position held by this writer is that people consist of three parts: a body, a soul (which consists of everything that makes people human beings) and a dead spirit which is made alive when one is born again, or regenerated, as a Christian.

In other words, the unregenerate person is a functioning dichotomy, while the regenerated, born again, Christian is a functioning trichotomy.

1 Thes. 5:23, see above

When the Spirit of God uses the word of God to regenerate a human being, his or her spirit comes alive or, to put it another way, is "born again". The spiritual dimension of his/her being which was once dead, i.e., their ability to related to God, is made alive again.

Heb. 4:12, *"For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit."*

God designed mankind to live and relate in three dimensions: to the physical world, to people (including themselves), and to himself.

i. The body (i.e. the *beten/geshem*)

The body allows us to relate to the physical world. It enables us to see, hear, taste, smell, experience and investigate the complexities of the physical universe. Since the fall our bodies are not all we wish them to be and will eventually die.

ii. The soul (i.e. the *nephesh/psyche*)

Our souls allow us to relate to other people as well as to ourselves. Our bodies are animated by our souls, which consists of everything which makes human, wilful, rational, emotional beings able to relate to each other. Basically, the soul comprises everything pertaining to human thinking and acting. Once a human soul has been created it lasts forever.

So the soul includes the mind, will and ability to feel non-physical pains (like anguish, love, etc). The soul enables people to develop as humans, contemplate their past, live in community, enjoy the fruits of human creativity, etc.

In a limited sense (from none to some) animals also have souls. As anyone who has had a pet dog knows, along with their natural instincts they have their own individual characters, wills, and emotions.

Numerous OT references state that the same divine *ruah* and *nephesh* which animates man also animates the animal world.

Eccl. 3:19, "*For that which happens to the sons of men happens to animals. Even one thing happens to them. As the one dies, so the other dies. Yes, they have all one breath (i.e. nephesh); and man has no advantage over the animals: for all is vanity.*"

Thus at the level of the soul the distinction between people and animals is one of degree, though the distance between humans and even the highest primates is vast at this level. Furthermore there is no evidence that the souls of animals live on after the death of their bodies.

Note that sanctification takes place at the level of the soul, i.e., at our wilful, rational and emotional levels.

iii. Spirit (i.e. the *ruah/pneuma*)

The spirit is that aspect of human beings which enables them to relate rightly to the spiritual world, and notably to God. The problem is that since the fall into sin mankind's spiritual dimension is dead. When contact with the living God was broken, they lost the ability to respond rightly in the realm of the spirit. They became spiritually dead, unresponsive.

The phrase translated "unspiritual man" is actually *psychikos de anthrospos*, which literally means "psychic man" or "man of the soul".

1 Cor. 2:10-11, 14, "*The unspiritual man (i.e. man of the soul) does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned...God has revealed to us [these things] through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths [the deep things] of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God"* (RSV).

In other words, the realm of the spirit is only rightly discernible by those whose have been given renewed spirits by God's Holy Spirit.

The OT looked forward to a time when God would equip his people by giving them a "heart of flesh", or putting a "new spirit" into them.

Ezek. 11:19, *“I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh.”*

Ezek. 36:26-27, *“I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my ordinances, and do them.”*

The New Testament refers to this as regeneration and the new birth.

Jn. 3:6, *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”*

Rom. 8:10, *“If Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of righteousness.”*

Rom. 8:16, *“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.”*

1 Cor. 2:9-10, *“But as it is written, ‘Things which an eye did not see, and an ear did not hear, which did not enter into the heart of man, (i.e., that which cannot be seen, heard and reasoned and as such determine the limits of human knowledge) these God has prepared for those who love him.’ But to us, God revealed them through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.”*

The Bible says that when God created man he created him in his own image. This means many things, but among them is the fact that since God is a trinity, man became a trinity also. God exists in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Man also became a trinity when God created him with a body, soul and spirit. Everyone knows what the body is: that part of man that we can see. Man shares with the plant world the fact that he has a body. In addition to a body, man also possesses a soul. A soul is that part of man that gives him his identity. It is with the soul that man thinks, feels, reacts and aspires. A man is linked to the animal world by his soul, for the animals also have a sense of identity. That is why Jesus said, *“The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests.”* That is, they know who they are, and they return to that which is theirs.

In addition to a body and a soul, however, a man also possesses a spirit or (as we should probably say for all men since the fall) he possesses the capacity for one. It is this capacity that sets man apart from the animal world. The spirit is that part of man that has consciousness of God. Consequently, man worships, while animals do not.

Boice, John. p. 192.

c. Unity

The word "heart" is the biblical idiom for the totality of one's invisible self. The Bible recognizes people as fundamental unities.

Many false views and practices have emerged from a belief that the physical and the spiritual aspects of man are in conflict, or that one is more important than the other. For example, a devaluing of the body can lead to two opposite extremes:

asceticism > "I must treat my body harshly to release the soul from its bondage."

antinomianism > "I can do what I like with my body because only the spiritual matters."

d. Implications:

The different aspects of mankind's nature are to be respected, for one's spiritual, mental, and physical health are integrated. It is only in the intermediate period, at physical death, that body and soul are separated until the time God grants believers their new, eternal bodies.

See 2 Cor. 5:1-10.

6. What is the origin of the human soul? Where does it come from?

There are a number of different ideas about the origin of the soul.

6.1. Pre-existent

This idea holds that all souls previously existed in heaven and enter the human body sometime after conception.

This view, held by the early Christian scholar Origen (184-253 A.D), has no biblical foundation. In fact it can lean dangerously towards the notion of reincarnation.

6.2. Created

God creates each individual soul after conception. This idea states that people receive their bodies from their parents but that their souls are created by God at some stage in the gestation period.

Eccl. 12:7, "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

Zech. 12:1, "Yahweh, who stretches out the heavens, and lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him."

Heb. 12:9, *“Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?”*

(Note: remember, in the OT the words soul and spirit are used interchangeably)

This is the position of the Roman Catholic Church and, surprisingly, of John Calvin (though many Calvinists differ with him on this).

This would mean that God creates something imperfect with every human being conceived, as both the Bible and human experience show that people possess a sinful nature. They resemble their parents not just in physical terms but also with respect to character traits.

6.3. Traducianism

This idea states that the human race was created “in Adam” with respect to the body and the soul, and that both are passed on through natural reproduction. There is no further act of soul-creation by God.

This accounts for both the sinful nature and non-physical character traits that are passed on from parent to child. This was first taught by Origen’s contemporary Tertullian (160-220 A.D.). Luther also embraced it.

Heb. 7:10, *“He (i.e., Levi, the great-grandson of Abraham) was yet in the body of his father when Melchizedek met him.”*

Psa. 51:5, *“Behold, I was born in iniquity. In sin my mother conceived me.”*

Psa. 58:3, *“The wicked go astray from the womb. They are wayward as soon as they are born, speaking lies.”*

And this takes us to the doctrine of sin...

X

Hamartiology: Sin and the Fall

“Through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” (Rom. 3:20)



1. Things are clearly not as they should be with both the natural world and people. Why is that?

It is universally recognized that this world in general and mankind in particular are not perfect, and that there is much that is wrong in our lives. Human tragedies abound and have always done so. Many people also find it difficult to see any order or purpose to their lives.

Different philosophies and religions offer various explanations and remedies for all this chaos, strife, conflict and sense of meaninglessness.

The Bible ascribes this condition to sin. From Gen. 3 on the Bible depicts sin as a universal fact. The term used to describe the doctrine of sin is hamartiology, from the Greek word *hamartia*, which means missing the mark, to be in error.

2. How does the Bible describe sin?

The Bible uses a variety of terms for sin, each of which contribute to our picture of what sin is and how it affects us.

2.1. Words used to describe sin

For those who do not know the biblical languages the best way to understand the different words the Bible uses to describe sin is by using a more literal translation like the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

Original idea	Hebrew or Greek terms	English translation	Example
to miss the mark	<i>chattath</i> (Hebrew)	sin	Ex. 32:30 Judg. 20:16
to revolt or rebel against rightful authority, to trespass	<i>pasha</i> (Hebrew)	transgress transgression rebel	1 Ki. 12:19 Psa. 19: 13 Isa. 1:28
to be crooked	<i>awon</i> (Hebrew)	iniquity guilt	Psa. 103:10b Jer. 2:22; Lam. 3:9b

HAMARTIOLOGY: SIN AND THE FALL

to be wicked	<i>rasa</i> (Hebrew)	do evil, act wickedly	2 Sam. 22:22
to go astray from the right path, sin through ignorance	<i>sagah</i> (Hebrew)	gone wrong	Lev. 4:2 Job 6:24 Ezek. 34:6a
to miss a mark, be in error	<i>hamartia</i> <i>hamartano</i> (Greek)	sin	Lk. 11: 4; 17:3-4 Rom. 3:23
falling where one should have stood upright, error.	<i>paraptoma</i> (Greek, 23 times)	trespasses, offences, fall, faults, sins	Rom. 5: 15 Eph. 2:1
going over a forbidden limit; breaking a command.	<i>parabasis</i> (Greek, 16 times)	transgression	Gal. 3:19; Rom. 4:15
deliberate lawbreaking	<i>asebeia</i> (Greek)	ungodliness	Rom. 1:18
lawlessness	<i>anomia</i> or <i>paranomia</i> (Greek 15 times)	lawlessness or wickedness	2 Thes. 2: 7 1 Cor. 9:21
wrong against other people	<i>adikia</i> (Greek)	unrighteousness, injustice	Lk. 18:6
error, deception	<i>plané</i> (Greek)	deception, error, perversion	Mat. 27:64 Eph. 4:14; Jude 11

In some passages several of these words are used together.

Psa. 32:1-2, *“How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!”* (NASB)

Isa. 53:5-6, *“But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”* (NASB)

Dan. 9:5, *“We have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances.”* (NASB)

2.2. Biblical descriptions of sin

a. "The transgression of the law".

This is the fundamental description of sin. In the garden of Eden Adam and Eve crossed the line (i.e., law/boundary) which God had set for them – and that has been the essence of sin ever since.

The English word transgression comes from a Latin word for "stepping across an established boundary". Without clear boundaries it is impossible to know if one has sinned.

Rom. 3:20, *"Through the law comes the knowledge of sin."*

Rom. 4:15, *"For the law produces wrath, for where there is no law, neither is there disobedience."*

Rom. 7:7-11, *"I wouldn't have known sin, except through the law. For I wouldn't have known coveting, unless the law had said, "You shall not covet... For apart from the law, sin is dead... when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."*

1 Jn. 3:4, *"Everyone who sins also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness."*

b. "The schemes of folly" or "the thoughts of foolishness" (KJV)

When Adam entertained the thought of becoming "like God" he thought foolishly.

Prov. 24:9, *"The schemes of folly are sin."*

c. Unrighteousness

Going against that which is right, which is determined by God, the source of all that is right and good.

1 Jn. 5:17, *"All unrighteousness is sin."*

d. Not doing the right thing

Jam. 4:17, *"To him therefore that knows to do good but does not do it, to him it is sin."*

e. Self-righteous good acts!

Even righteous and charitable acts may be nothing but self-righteousness and be tainted by pride, ulterior motives and self-interest.

Isa. 64:6, *"All our righteousness is like a polluted garment."*

See also Jesus' statements about the righteousness of the Pharisees in Mat. 23:13-33, or Paul's evaluation of his own righteousness in Phil. 3:4-9.

f. Unbelief

Adam and Eve preferred to believe the serpent (Gen. 3:1-6).

Rom. 14:23, "*Whatever is not of faith is sin.*"

2.3. The way Christian theologians have described sin

"We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done." (*The General Confession in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer* 1662)

"The common notion that sin is selfishness betrays a false assessment of its nature and gravity. Essentially, sin is directed against God, and this perspective alone accounts for the diversity of its form and activities. It is a violation of that which God's glory demands and is, therefore, in its essence the contradiction of God... The origin of sin according to Gen 3 ought not to be sought so much in an overt action (2:17 with 3:6) but in an inward, God-denying aspiration of which the act of disobedience was the immediate expression." (Milne, B.A. 1995. "Sin", *New Bible Dictionary*)

"If the narrative of Genesis 3 is to be interpreted not only as the historical account of Adam's sin, but also as an account of the origin of sin, then the sin of Adam must be recognized as the primary biblical definition of the essence of sin—*i.e.* a grasping for spiritual and moral autonomy rooted in unbelief and rebellion." (Colwell, J. E. 1988. "Sin", *New Dictionary of Theology*)

Once we understand that every sin we commit is an expression (in differing degrees of self-consciousness) of the spirit of revolt against God's will/law we will be able to make David's confession our own: "*Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight*" (Ps 51:4).

3. What, exactly, is the relationship between the law of God and sin?

If there had been no law to violate then sin would not have taken place, for "*sin is not imputed when there is no law*" (Rom. 5:13).

"*What shall we say then, is the law sin? God forbid*" (Rom. 7:7). The law is holy, just, good and spiritual (Rom. 7:12-14).

God's laws lead to order and harmony.

3.1. Law is needed to create and maintain order in the universe

a. Laws bring order to the realm of inanimate nature

God created the universe to be ordered by natural laws, something which makes science possible. Without law everything would collapse into chaos.

Order and harmony can only exist in the universe to the extent that creation follows the laws of nature. The physical universe has no choice in this matter if it is to avoid chaos and dissolution.

b. Laws bring order to the realm of wilful creatures

When God created personal beings (angels and subsequently mankind) he created them as moral agents with free wills.

For a multitude of free wills to act as free agents without any laws to govern their behaviour leads to conflict, collision, chaos and ultimate destruction for each would pursue its own agenda. Each would become "*a law unto themselves*" (Rom. 2:14-15).

The only way to secure harmony and order is for all individual wills to be subjected to the will of God. By governing the creatures he has created within a legal framework within which they were to operate, God sought to maintain harmony and order in the universe. Hence the Bible describes the law as good.

Rom. 7:12, "*Therefore the law indeed is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good.*"

1 Tim. 1:8, "*We know that the law is good, if a man uses it lawfully.*"

God demanded unconditional, voluntary submission to his law for our own good (Deut. 5:29; 6:24), which he spelled out in a series of covenants to his people. In the keeping of these covenants they would be blessed.

Ex. 19:5, "*Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine.*"

Jam. 1:25, "*But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does.*"

3.2. The results of breaking of the law

As the law-giver God had to ensure that his law be obeyed, and judge any violation. Any violation was sin, a principle true for both angels and men.

Breaking the law (breaking covenant, i.e., sinning), was an expression of revolt and made the lawbreaker legally culpable before the most holy, righteous God.

Breaking the law would also result in chaos, alienation, a loss of free will, and eventually for human beings, physical death.

Breaking a single command is sufficient to poison one's relationship with God. Think of a drop of poison in a pot of tea. No matter how much sugar you add, it remains unacceptable, undrinkable.

4. Are people who live without the knowledge of God's law culpable when they break it?

Sometimes the question is phrased as, "how could Cain's murder be sin if there was no law against it?"

Prior to the written law, and anywhere where God's law as revealed in the Bible is unknown, people still understand the nature of moral choices. This "natural law" is "*written on their heart*" (Rom. 2:15), as is shown by the fact that they expect others to treat them a certain way.

Rom. 2:1, "Therefore you are without excuse, O man, whoever you are who judge. For in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself. For you who judge practice the same things."

Rom. 2:14-15, "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them."

Most people know instinctively that you must not murder another human being, take their possessions without their permission, sleep with someone else's wife, etc. Note how Pharaoh berated Abram:

Gen. 12:18-19, "Pharaoh called Abram and said, 'What is this that you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now therefore, see your wife, take her, and go your way.'"

Even when the details of the law are not spelled out, people instinctively know right from wrong—unless they personally or their societies have allowed themselves to become so perverted that, in the course of time, wrong comes to be thought of as good.

God placed the basic framework of the moral law in their hearts, and is thus able to hold them to account. In essence the law has always existed.

5. Should we consider the Genesis account of the fall into sin as historical?

The NT treats the fall as a historic event with lasting consequences for all humanity.

Rom. 5:17-18, "If by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life."

Our Christian presuppositions compel us to think along certain lines, just as the presuppositions of atheists, Muslims, etc., force them to think along particular lines. For the Christian, one of these presuppositions is that the biblical account of the fall into sin took place in space and time. If Genesis 2 and 3 do not form a continuous, historical narrative, then we are left with no space-time entry of sin into human life. And if this were the case, the biblical teaching that Christ entered history as the "second Adam" to undo the results of Adam's fall would make no sense. See Rom. 5:17-18 above.

The Genesis narrative explains how people, though created in God's image in order to relate happily with him and each other, are alienated from both him and from each other. It explains how people can be so noble yet so evil, and how they can use and control nature yet also be defeated by it.

6. What theories are there about the origins and effects of sin and evil?

6.1. Non-biblical theories

a. Naturalism

Holds that morality evolved as a survival mechanism, and denies the existence of a God to whom mankind is morally responsible. Sin ceases to be the breaking of an absolute norm and comes to be perceived as something biologically determined. We cannot be held responsible for our drives and urges any more than animals are.

b. Nurturism

The broken environment in which people are raised causes them to act wrongly. Man is essentially good but needs a good environment within which to progress. Evil is socially determined. The root of the problem is nurture not nature.

c. Both above positions are types of deterministic views

According to the above-mentioned ideas, the idea that man had/has a free will is a delusion: his nature and/or nurture determines how he will act, whether good or bad. Hence aberrant behaviour is not blameworthy as such. It is a sickness which needs to be treated.

d. Evolution

The evolutionist would not acknowledge the idea of sin, as it assumes the idea of a creator and the existence of absolute truth. Antisocial behaviour are traces of the animal in us, a remnant of the instinct for individual survival. These animalistic tendencies need to be subdued, or brought under control. They will eventually disappear as man continues his progress through history.

e. Hedonism

People are free to do whatever they want so long as it does not hurt someone else. "If it feels good, do it!"

These rationalizations of sin, if held consistently, lead to people's consciences becoming increasingly hardened. The danger of this is that they become insensitive to the conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit.

Tit. 1:15, "To those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their mind and their conscience are defiled."

1 Tim. 4:2, "Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron." (NIV)

The principle of the seesaw in theology

It is the principle that you cannot have both ends of the seesaw – God and man – up at the same time. You know how a seesaw operates. When Johnny is at the bottom, Suzie is at the top. And when Suzie is down, Johnny is up. In the same way you can never have God and man up or down at the same time. If you exalt man in your thinking so that he is able to take care of himself spiritually and eventually inch his way into heaven, then God will be down and there will not be much need for him. But if man is down where he should be and where the Bible places him, dead in trespasses and sins, with a depraved will and utterly without any genuine spiritual potential, then God will be up where he belongs. He will be great and mighty and altogether lovely, as he is. And the Christian, who has come to see these things, will look up from the dung heap of this world, still covered with much of the world's refuse, and say, "Oh, my God, how could you love me"? And when he gets to that point the love of Christ will begin to constrain him, and he will begin to learn that God has set things up this way so that it will be with the bonds of love and not the whip of the law that we are drawn to the holiness through the Lord Jesus Christ. **Boice, John, p. 83.**

6. 2. Theories about sin Christians have held

a. Pelagianism

First taught by Pelagius, a British monk born around 370 A.D. He held that Adam's sin affected only Adam himself, and that every soul is created by God and is free from sin and depraved tendencies.

In other words, sin only consists of wilful acts which people consciously perform. Adam's death refers only to his physical self, not to his spiritual self.

However, the Bible teaches that all people inherit a sinful nature from Adam. Though originally created in the image of God, they now take after Adam.

Gen. 5:3, "Adam lived one hundred thirty years, and became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth."

Job 14:4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one."

Psa. 51:5, "Behold, I was born in iniquity. In sin my mother conceived me."

Rom. 5:12, "Therefore as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned..."

b. Seminal view of the fall (Arminianism)

Arminius (1560-1609) was a professor of theology in Holland. He held that as a result of Adam's sin all people are born with a sinful nature and incapable of attaining righteousness apart from the prevenient grace of God. However, people are not held guilty because of Adam's sin; they are only accountable for their own actions.

This position is known as seminalism. Put another way, it holds that because the human race was genetically present in Adam, his corrupted nature after the fall was passed on to his descendants, but not his personal guilt. Because of their corrupted nature his descendants quickly fall into sin as well, sins for which they are then held culpable. In other words, people sin because they are created like ("in the image of") their father Adam.

Gen. 5:3, see above.

Ezek. 18:4-20, "The one who sins is the one who will die. Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right... That man is righteous; he will surely live, declares the Sovereign LORD. Suppose he has a violent son... Will such a man live? He will not! ... his blood will be on his own head. But suppose this son has a son who sees all the sins his father

commits, and though he sees them, he does not do such things... He keeps my laws and follows my decrees. He will not die for his father's sin; he will surely live. The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them."

Rom. 5:12, *"Therefore as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned."*

c. Federal/Representational view of the fall (Augustinianism/Calvinism)

Augustine (354-430) was Pelagius' great opponent. He held that both Adam's sin and his guilt were imputed immediately to all his unborn descendants because all men were "in Adam". John Calvin incorporated Augustine's view into his theological system, which came to be known as Calvinism.

Just as Adam was found guilty because of his sin, so all men are found guilty by virtue of the fact that there is an organic unity between Adam and all of his descendants. His will became the will of all mankind, for which all are counted guilty.

According to this view God made a covenant with Adam in which Adam operated as the federal head of the human race. Just like the leader of a country makes agreements with other nations which are binding on all of that country's citizens, even if they had no personal input into the decision and may even be unaware of it, so Adam represented the entire human race. His actions would either lead to eternal life for himself and all his descendants, or to death and a corrupt nature.

Rom. 5:18, *"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."*

1 Cor. 15:22, *"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."*

When he sinned everyone he represented became sinners as well. Both Adam's sinful nature and his guilt were imputed to all his descendants.

7. So who is right, the Federalists (Calvin) or the Seminalists (Arminius)?

Genuine Christians are found in both camps. Both positions agree on the reality of original sin and total depravity, that people are spiritually dead in their

trespasses and sin as a result of Adam's fall (Eph. 2:1 Ps. 51:1-5), and that there is no salvation outside the work which Christ accomplished for sinners on the cross.

Both have weaknesses. One logical consequence of the Federal position is that God seems to create each soul with a corrupted, sinful nature as punishment for Adam's sin. The idea that God actually creates corrupted souls seems at variance with the biblical teaching that there is no sin or corruption in God.

1 Jn. 1:5, *"This is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."*

Critics of the federal position also point out that although people commonly suffer as a result of other people's sins, there is an inherent injustice in holding them culpable for things they did not actually do, and point out that in Paul's systematic explanation of the sinfulness of all men in the book of Romans he does not actually charge people of being legally culpable for Adam's sin. He condemns both Jews and Gentiles of breaking the law, whether that be their own consciences or the law of Moses.

However, peoples' wills certainly do have a natural "downward" bent inherited from Adam, which makes them do things for which they are culpable. This is what Calvin calls total depravity. By that he means that because by nature people are "dead in their trespasses and sin" (Eph. 2:1) they are incapable of responding to God's grace.

Arminius' system is sometimes called semi-pelagianism by its Calvinist critics, but this is unwarranted. Arminius himself shared Calvin's view on the nature of total depravity in terms of mankind being spiritually dead in sin, and that every aspect of mankind was negatively affected by sin. However, subsequent "free will" Arminians do indeed hold that mankind retains the ability to choose for or against God when presented with the gospel, a position which can rightly be calling semi-pelagian.

A newly converted African was caught stealing from the missionaries.

"It wasn't me who stole," he protested. "It was grandfather-in-the-bones!"

Later, after he had grown as a Christian, the missionary asked him, "And how is grandfather-in-the bones doing these days?"

"Well, grandfather-in-the bones isn't dead yet, but he doesn't get about like he used to," the man responded.

8. What are the effects of sin on mankind?

Mankind died spiritually. This means that mankind's formerly innate, natural ability to maintain a healthy relationship with the holy God ceased and a host of evils began affecting every aspect of their being.

When Adam and Eve sinned...

8.1. They became morally culpable, guilty lawbreakers before God

They stood as guilty sinners before a holy God for having broken the covenant of works with him.

Eph. 2:3c. *"We were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."*

8.2. They became afraid of God

First they hid from him, then tried to make themselves presentable to him.

8.3. They felt a sense of shame as a result of their guilty consciences

When they sinned their conscience convicted them and they instantly felt shame. Adam and Eve tried to cover up their nakedness after their disobedience (Gen. 3:7, 2/25).

A guilty conscience led to feelings of guilt: *"Their thoughts now accusing now excusing them"* (Rom. 2:14-15).

8.4. They started blaming others

Adam blamed the woman and God for giving him the woman, and the woman blamed the snake (Gen. 3:11-13).

8.4. They began to experience the loneliness of God-forsakenness

Alienation from God creates great loneliness.

Psalm 25:16, *"Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted."* (ESV)

Christ's great cry of dereliction on the cross was, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Mat. 27:46)

8.5. They became acquainted with evil

Not only did they become acquainted with evil, henceforth they were predisposed to do evil.

Note that in Revelation the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will not be restored. Only the tree of life will be restored.

See also Rom. 7:18-24.

8.6. They would experience physical death

Spiritual death was instant, and their bodies would follow in due course.

8.7. Their natures became corrupted

a. They became captives of sin/their sin nature.

Sin affected every aspect of their inner being, i.e., their 'hearts'. Sin holds us captive, unable to change.

Jer. 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?"

Mk. 7:21f, "For from within, out of the hearts of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, sexual sins, murders, thefts..."

Jn. 8:34, "Jesus answered them, 'Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin.'"

We are biased towards sin – like a supermarket trolley with a faulty wheel, which refuses to run straight. As a result, we are both unable and unwilling to come to God.

Jn. 3:3, "Jesus answered him, "Most certainly, I tell you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see God's Kingdom."

Jn. 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

Jn. 6:65, "He [Jesus] said, "For this cause have I said to you that no one can come to me, unless it is given to him by my Father."

Eph. 2:1, 5, "You were dead in transgressions and sins... [but now are] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."

The world around us is filled with invisible messages, music and pictures coming to us on radio and television waves. We know they are there, but no one innately has the equipment enabling them to receive these things. In the same way the natural man is not equipped to relate to the invisible, spiritual world.

b. Their souls (i.e. their minds, will, and emotions) were affected

Mankind became self-centered, emotionally unstable, with a will, mind and emotions that were at odds with God's will.

i. Mind

People who are otherwise intelligent and clear-thinking cannot understand the relevance of the gospel. People who are otherwise friendly, polite and even religious quickly become hostile to the claims of Christ.

Rom. 8:7-8, "The mind of the flesh is hostile towards God; for it is not subject to God's law, neither indeed can it be. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Eph. 4:17-18, *“you no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding....”*

Col. 1:21, *“You, being in past times alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil deeds.”*

1 Cor. 1:18, *“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are saved it is the power of God.”*

1 Cor. 2:14, *“Now the natural man does not receive the things of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

See also Jn. 3:9-12; 15:18, 23.

ii. Will

The question of the nature of the will (is it free or not) will be looked at in detail later. Suffice it to say at this stage that fallen people are not able not to sin.

Jonathan Edwards put it this way, *“The will is simply the mind choosing what the mind deems best. The problem is with man’s moral nature, which is opposed to God, and with the sinful motives that flow from that corrupt nature... We always choose what we judge best in a given situation. But as sinners we always judge wrongly. We think God undesirable. Hence we always resist him and reject the gospel.”*²⁷

1 Jn. 1:8, *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*

See also Rom. 3:1-23

Hence people are completely unable to save themselves:

Rom. 5:8, *“But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Eph. 2:1-3, *“You were made alive when you were dead in transgressions and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lust of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”*

²⁷ Quoted in Boice, *Ephesians*. p.47

Jn. 5:40, "You will not come to me, that you may have life."

Rom. 7:15-20, "For I do not know what I am doing. For I do not practice what I desire to do; but what I hate, that I do. But if what I do not desire, that I do, I consent to the law that it is good. So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. For desire is present with me, but I do not find it doing that which is good. For the good which I desire, I do not do; but the evil which I do not desire, that I practice. But if what I do not desire, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me."

Eph. 2:1-3, "you were dead in transgressions and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lust of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

Augustine first coined the biblically correct statement that sinful man is "not able not to sin" (*non posse non peccare*). In other words, sinful mankind is not in bondage to some kind of outside coercion, but to its own corrupted nature. In other words, we freely choose according to what we want—but our desires are determined by our sinful nature.

iii. Emotions

Gal. 5:19-21, "Now the deeds of the flesh are obvious, which are: adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit God's Kingdom."

iv. Outward behaviour

Gen. 6:5, "Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was continually only evil."

Sin spoils even the relatively good things we do. Even when we believe that God's standards are good and when we hate evil, we fail.

Isa. 64:6, *“For we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”*

We love our sins!

A radio preacher declared that the Bible mentions 572 different sins. Afterwards he received numerous requests for the list from those who were afraid they might be missing out on something!

8.8. The term used to describe the sinful state of man is “total depravity”

This is a theological term meaning that every part and aspect of mankind is infected by and predisposed towards sin. Some theologians prefer the term *Inherited Corruption* (Grudem, 497, footnote)].

Total depravity does not mean absolute depravity. We are not as bad as we could possibly be, and we do not all commit all the sins we could possibly commit.

Total depravity is not the complete absence of relative good. God’s common grace continues to be operative. Evil is the corruption of that which is good.

2 Kin. 10:30f, *“Yahweh said to Jehu, ‘Because you have done well in executing that which is right in my eyes, and have done to Ahab’s house according to all that was in my heart, your descendants shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.’ But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of Yahweh, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, with which he made Israel to sin.”*

Lk. 6:32-33, *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.”*

9. Where did Satan and the demonic world come from?

God created many types of spiritual beings: angels, seraphim, cherubim, spirits, all of whom were originally good, created for worship and service.

Psa. 103:20, *“Praise Yahweh, you angels of his, who are mighty in strength, who fulfil his word, obeying the voice of his word.”*

See also Isaiah 6.

Whether good or evil, spiritual beings are numerous.

Mk. 5:13, *"The unclean spirits came out and entered into the pigs. The herd of about two thousand rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and they were drowned in the sea."*

Lk. 2:13, *"Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army praising God."*

At some stage after they were created, Satan rebelled, and a host of angels followed after him.

Jude 6, *"And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day."* (NIV)

2 Pet. 2:4, *"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment..."* (NIV)

Traditionally, Christians identify two OT passages, Isa. 14:3-20 and Ezek. 28, with the fall of Satan. Though the immediate context deals with the kings of Babylon and Tyre respectively, both passages clearly go beyond the human dimension. The kings described had become like their father the Devil; they had become "in his image".

10. What is Satan like?

Understanding this question helps us understand why there is so much suffering in the world.

1 Jn. 3:8, *"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. To this end the Son of God was revealed: that he might destroy the works of the devil."*

10.1. His name, Satan, means adversary

1 Thes. 2:18, *"We wanted to come to you – indeed, I, Paul, once and again – but Satan hindered us."*

10.2. The word devil comes from the Greek *diabolos*, meaning accuser

He is the one who accuses people before God. In a certain sense he is like a prosecutor.

Zech. 3:1. *"He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before Yahweh's angel, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary."*

Rev. 12:10, *"I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, the power, and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ has come;*

for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night."

10.3. He is the leader of evil spiritual forces

Eph. 2:2, Satan is "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience."

10.4. He is a personal being; he is not just an evil influence

Jn. 8:44, "You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks on his own; for he is a liar, and its father."

10.5. The Bible calls him "the god of this world"

2 Cor. 4:4, "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."

10.6. The evil one

1 Jn. 2:13, "I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one."

10.7. The tempter

Mk. 1:13, "He was there in the wilderness forty days tempted by Satan."

10.8. "The Dragon", that ancient serpent"

Rev. 12:9, "The great dragon was thrown down, the old serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him."

Rev. 20:2, "He seized the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited earth, and bound him for a thousand years."

The Bible does not give us answers to our questions about Satan merely to satisfy our curiosity. Its teachings about the powers of evil are given to show the reality of evil, to proclaim the triumph of Christ over the powers of evil, and to warn believers against evil. God has a practical concern for our safety!

11. What is spiritual warfare?

Spiritual warfare is the totality of our engagement with the forces which seek to undermine faith in and loyalty to Christ. The Bible describes these forces as "the world, the flesh and the devil".

Eph. 2:1-2:

(1) *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,* (i.e. the desires of the flesh; enemy within)

(2) *in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world* (i.e. the influences of society battering us from all sides)

(3) *and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient* (i.e. demonic attack.)

Although spiritual warfare takes place on all three fronts, the term “spiritual warfare” is typically used today to describe the Christian’s engagement with the third category.

So what is this more limited concept of demonic attack all about?

11.1. The Bible describes the world as “under the control of the evil one”

Satan is real and he is powerful.

1 Jn. 5:19, *“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”*

According to Gen. 1:26 and 2:15 God gave the authority to rule over this world to Adam and Eve. When the first pair fell into sin, however, their authority passed into Satan’s hands—though Satan’s authority remained within God’s sovereignty; God remains as king over the world.

The Bible describes Satan and his minions as:

- A “*dominion of darkness*” (Col. 1:13).
- “*power and dominion*”, “*rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms*”, “*rulers... authorities... the powers of this dark world... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*” (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12).
- “*rulers of this age*”, “*spirit of the world*” (1 Cor. 2:8, 12).
- “*the elemental spiritual forces of the world*” (Gal. 4:3).

In short, these Satanic forces seek to corrupt, alienate, enslave and ruin all that is good and holy.

No wonder this world is full of sad, absurd, inexplicable, grievous events...

11.2. BUT Satan’s control over the world is limited

Satan’s control over the world is not absolute. It is limited by three things:

a. Common grace

In his mercy God grants mankind countless blessings which, though not part of saving grace, make this world as good as it is. Common grace keeps this world from becoming the hell Satan would like turn it into. When it is withdrawn societies become cruel and dysfunctional. Even when common grace is removed, however, God's Spirit often uses the increase in evil to soften hard hearts towards the gospel.

b. Christ's victory at Calvary

Christ's work at Calvary provided the legal basis for God's redeeming a people for himself. In Christ God's absolute holiness and justice were reconciled with his absolute love and mercy. On the basis of that victory God could reclaim good from evil (see Chapter XIV).

Furthermore, Christ was given authority over the demonic world.

Mat. 12:28, "But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then God's Kingdom has come upon you."

In other words: God's kingdom is wherever Satan's will has been defeated and God's will prevails.

c. The presence of the body of believers, i.e. the Church

The place outside of heaven where Satan's will should be the least evident is the church, i.e., that body of regenerated believers which seeks to live life in accordance with its heavenly Father's will.

This body of believers is called to do whatever is necessary to resist Satan's will and align itself with its heavenly Father's will – and to urge others to do the same.

In other words, God has chosen to use the body of believers, the church, in his enterprise of calling people out from under Satan's will and to submit to his. This is its missionary mandate, and the process involved (such as prayer and proclamation in the face of demonic opposition) is called spiritual warfare.

11.3. Demonic opposition is something more than conflict between people

a. Spiritual forces are involved

Eph. 6:12, "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

b. It began before the fall of mankind in paradise

Gen. 3:1-15.

c. It will not end until Satan is finally removed from the stage of history

Rev. 20:10, "The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

11.4. Glimpses of spiritual warfare in the Bible

Note: I define the phrase "kingdom of God" as "anywhere where God's will is embraced". Cultures differ from each other in part because of the inroads which the kingdom of God has made in them.

a. The spiritual forces surrounding Dothan

2 Kin. 6:16-17, "Do not be afraid; for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Elisha prayed, and said, "Yahweh, please open his eyes, that he may see." Yahweh opened the young man's eyes; and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha."

b. The spiritual forces behind the political powers of this world

Dan. 10:12-13, "Then he said to me, Do not be afraid, Daniel; for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard: and I have come for your words' sake. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but, behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me: and I remained there with the kings of Persia."

d. The opposition to the gospel by Elymas the sorcerer

Acts 13:9-11, "But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fastened his eyes on him, and said, 'Full of all deceit and all cunning, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is on you, and you will be blind, not seeing the sun for a season!' Immediately a mist and darkness fell on him. He went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand."

e. The opposition to the gospel by the slave girl who had an evil spirit

Ac. 16:16-18, "As we were going to prayer, a certain girl having a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much gain by fortune telling. Following Paul and us, she cried out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us a way of salvation!" She was doing this for many days. But Paul, becoming greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" It came out that very hour."

11.5. Practical examples of spiritual conflict from daily life

- Conflicts among church elders or on a missionary team which seem to arise for no valid reason.
- An outsider who insists on “participating” in gospel activities.
- Conflicts which new converts face, particularly those who had previously engaged in occult practices.
- Attacks prior to baptism.

11.6. Basic truths to remember when engaging in spiritual warfare

a. Christ has won the victory

The final result of the battle was decided at Calvary.

Heb. 2:14-15, “Since then the children have shared in flesh and blood, he also himself in the same way partook of the same, that through death he might bring to nothing him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver all of them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

b. Christians can share in that victory

In fact, many of the rights and privileges believers are given as children of the living God are given to us for this purpose.

Rom. 8:37-39, “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

See Heb. 2:14-15 above.

c. The Spirit has given us everything we need to defeat the enemy

2 Cor. 10:3-4, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds.”

The weapons of spiritual warfare are:

- knowing the truth, i.e. Jesus Christ
- living a righteous life
- participating in the spread of the gospel
- continuing to trust in God
- controlling your thought-life

- knowing your Bible
- persevering in prayer

Eph. 6:10-11, *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world’s rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*

d. The indwelling Spirit himself stands with us in this warfare

Ac. 1:8, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”*

Rom. 15:18-19, *“For I will not dare to speak of any things except those which Christ worked through me, for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of God’s Spirit; so that from Jerusalem, and around as far as to Illyricum, I have fully preached the Good News of Christ.”*

1 Thes. 1:4-5, *“We know, brothers loved by God, that you are chosen, and that our Good News came to you not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance.”*

2 Tim. 1:7, *“For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control.”*

11.7. The end is not in doubt!

Rom. 16:20, *“And the God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”*

Satan will never have more sovereignty than he has now. One day, when Jesus Christ comes again, he will secure total sovereignty. At that time there will be one will reigning sovereign over the universe. The prayer which the church prays whenever it repeats the Lord’s Prayer will be answered in full: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”.

At the same time sovereignty over this world will be returned to a man--just as God originally commanded!

God, who always carries through with his plans, will not allow the present state of the world to continue indefinitely. One day the God-Man Jesus Christ will return, and a man will, once again, rule the earth.

12. **Can I stop worrying about the subject of sin since the Bible teaches that although all have sinned, Jesus forgives sin?**

12.1. Forgiveness is no excuse to continue to sin wilfully

Rom. 12:2, *"Do not conform to this world... but be transformed..."*

1 Thes. 4:3, *"This is the will of God: your sanctification."*

1 Thes. 5:23, *"May God himself ... sanctify you through and through."*

Gal. 5: 19-21. *"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious... I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

12.2. The Bible condemns any person who calls himself a Christian but who wilfully continues in sin

Mat. 7: 21-23, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'" Followed by the parable of the wise and foolish builders.*

1 Jn. 2:3-6, *"This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commandments. One who says, "I know him," and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, God's love has most certainly been perfected in him. This is how we know that we are in him: he who says he remains in him ought himself also to walk just as he walked."*

See also Rom. 6:1-14; Jam. 1:19-27

13. **2 Cor. 5:17 says that as a Christian I am a new creation in Christ. Why do I still sin?**

13.1. Because of my own inner desires/cravings

Mk. 7:21, *"For from within, out of men's hearts, come ..."*

Rom. 7:15-20, *"I do not practice what I desire to do; but what I hate, that I do. But if what I do not desire, that I do, I consent to the law that it is good. So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. For desire is present with me, but I do not find it doing that which is good. For the good which I desire, I do not do; but the evil which I do not desire, that I practice. But if what I do not desire, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me."*

Gal. 5:17, *"The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other." (NIV)*

1 Pet. 2:11, *"Sinful desires, which war against your soul."*

See also Jam. 1:13-15.

13.2. Because of the temptations bombarding us from the world

1 Jn. 2:15-16, *“Do not love the world or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the Father’s love is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not the Father’s, but is the world’s.”*

13.3. Because of Satan

2 Cor. 11:3, *“The serpent deceived Eve in his craftiness.”*

1 Tim. 4:1, *“In later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons.”*

2 Tim. 2:24-26, *“...escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.” (NIV)*

14. How can I overcome my sin nature as a Christian?

We will cover this subject at length when we come to sanctification, but here are some initial points to consider:

14.1. Recognize that the struggle against sin is lifelong – there is no let-up

Like gravity pulling a plane to earth if its engines stop working, sin is a constant pull seeking to drag the believer down. And it will if, for some reason, the engines of his Christian faith stop pushing him/her forward.

14.2. The ongoing struggle against sin means we need to confess our sins continually to God in order to maintain our fellowship with him

Mat. 6:12, *“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

1 Jn. 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

14.3. The struggle against sin involves “identifying ourselves with Christ” and “offering the members of our body” to him on an ongoing basis

Rom. 6:6-7, 11-13, *“Our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be in bondage to sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin... Thus consider yourselves also to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. Also, do not present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”*

Rom. 12:1-2, *“Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.”*

14.4. The struggle against sin involves recognition that we are new creatures in Christ

As a result of their ongoing, willing identification with Christ, Christians have inner resources available to them—a regenerated spirit and the indwelling Holy Spirit—not available to others, which enable them to make headway (i.e. grow in sanctification) in the struggle against sin.

As new creatures in Christ (i.e. as those who are “regenerated”, “born again”, “born of the Spirit”) genuine Christians are given a new nature, and are called to live according to that nature as they allow the indwelling Holy Spirit to lead and re-form them.

Gal. 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me. That life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me.”*

Col. 3:3, *“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”*

See also Eph. 1:18-19

14.5. The struggle against sin involves “the mortification of the flesh”

Gaining victory over sin involves “putting off” the old nature and “putting on” the new nature.

You are to “put to death” or “put off” or “purify” or “not conform” to the worldly actions and desires which displease God.

This simply means that you offer your entire self to God on an ongoing basis, and say “no” to the things that displease God.

Rom. 8:9-13, *“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if it is so that the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his. If Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if you live after the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

Rom. 12:1-2, *“Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.”*

2 Cor. 7:1, *“Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”*

Col. 3:5, *“Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth: sexual immorality, uncleanness, depraved passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”*

14.6. Gaining victory over sin (i.e. “taking off the old nature and putting on the new”) means availing ourselves of the means of grace God provided for us in this ongoing battle

We must use the spiritual disciplines which God has made available to us.

Eph. 6: 10-18, *“Put on the full armour of God ...”*

Col. 1:29, *“I also labor, striving according to his (Christ’s) working, which works in me mightily.”*

Col 3:1, *“If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God...”*

Col. 3:12, *“Put on therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, humility, and perseverance...”*

15. Is there such a thing and the unpardonable sin?

The unpardonable or unforgivable sin is unique in that it will never be forgiven (“never” is the meaning of *“either in this age or in the age to come”* Mat. 12:32).

15.1. “Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”

In Mk .3:28-29 Jesus said, *“Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter,”* but then He gives one exception: *“Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin”*.

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit in this context refers to defiant irreverence or unbelief with respect to the work of the Spirit in the world through Christ. The Pharisees had witnessed irrefutable evidence that Jesus was working miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit, yet they claimed that He was possessed by the prince of demons, Beelzebul (See also Mat. 12:24-32; Mk. 3:30).

They accused Jesus Christ of being demon-possessed. They had no excuse for such an action for they were not speaking out of ignorance or misunderstanding. The Pharisees knew that Jesus was the Messiah sent by God to save Israel. They knew the OT prophecies were being fulfilled by him. They saw Jesus' wonderful works, and they heard his clear presentation of truth, yet they deliberately chose to deny the truth and slander the Holy Spirit. They defiantly closed their eyes and became wilfully blind. Jesus pronounced that sin to be unforgivable.

15.2. Continued unbelief

The only unpardonable sin today is that of continued unbelief. There is no pardon for a person who dies in his rejection of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is at work in the world, convicting the unsaved of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come (John 16:8). If a person resists that conviction and remains unrepentant, then he is choosing hell over heaven.

"Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6), and the object of faith is Jesus (Acts 16:31). There is no forgiveness for someone who dies without faith in Christ.

Many people fear they have committed some sin that God cannot or will not forgive, and they feel there is no hope for them, no matter what they do. Satan would like nothing more than to keep people laboring under that misconception.

God gives encouragement to the sinner who is convicted of his sin.

Jam. 4:8, *"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."*

Rom. 5:20, *"Where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly."*

The testimony of Paul is proof positive that God can and will save anyone who comes to him in faith (1 Tim. 1:12-17).

Anyone suffering under a load of guilt can rest assured that they have not committed the unpardonable sin. God is waiting with open arms. Jesus' promise is that *"he is also able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him"* (Heb. 7:25).

Our Lord will never fail. *"God is my salvation. I will trust, and will not be afraid; for Yah, Yahweh, is my strength and song; and he has become my salvation."* (Isa. 12:2).

X

The Nature, Person and Work of Christ

*“The virgin shall be with child and shall give birth to a son,
and shall call him Immanuel – which being interpreted means ‘God with us.’”*
(Isaiah 7:14)



THIS CHAPTER IS about who Jesus Christ is. It is the first in a series of chapters on Christology, the theological term used to describe all things pertaining to Jesus Christ.

1. Who is Jesus Christ?

Using the present tense about the person of Jesus immediately challenges the non-Christian with the fact that Christians actually believe that Jesus is more than someone who lived long ago.

“Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man in one person, and will be so forever.”
Wayne Grudem

The ability to explain this is important, for people of different religious traditions have legitimate questions about this mysterious statement.

Just loving Jesus and accepting him isn't enough. If you want to nurture a sustained love for someone you must have the right ideas about that individual. Thus having a true understanding about the person of Jesus Christ is of fundamental importance. If you get this wrong you can throw your Christianity out the window. It will soon be reduced to a folk religion, a religion which has no firm, satisfying foundation.

Many Christians today tend to separate a personal relationship with God from doctrinal belief. That separation was completely foreign to most Christians throughout history. The truth regarding Christ as the object of faith mattered very much, more even than the mere fact of believing in something. What one believed in was a matter of life and death.

Everything else will fall into place if your Christology is correct.

2. What are some inadequate views about the person of Christ?

For the first several hundred years of its existence the church struggled to define the relationship between the humanity and deity of Christ. Some false or inadequate views of the person of Christ that arose are as follows:

2.1. Doceticism

Denied Christ's full humanity, particularly with respect to his having a real, physical body.

The word "docetism" comes from the Greek word *dokein* meaning "an illusion". The Doketai held that Jesus' body was not real – it only appeared to be physical. This view came from the strong influence of platonic thinking, which had a low view of material things.

These docetic (platonic) ideas were taken up by the Gnostics. This, the earliest heresy, shared Platonism's low view of material things, leading them to deny that Jesus was fully man.

The apostle John faced an early form of this heresy in the late 1st century and reacted strongly against it.

1 Jn. 4:2-3, "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God, and this is the spirit of the Antichrist."

In 1 Jn. 1:1-3 he strongly emphasized Christ's physicality: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we saw, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life (and the life was revealed, and we have seen, and testify, and declare to you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was revealed to us); that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us. Yes, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

Gnostic doceticism probably caused the 2nd split in the early church (the first was Christianity's split with Judaism).

2.2. Arianism

According to the Arians, Christ was a created being. They denied the co-eternality of Christ with God the Father. Originally espoused by Arius, the bishop of Alexandria (died 336 A.D.). He held that God the Son was created by the Father, and that before that only the Father existed. He based this idea on verses like:

Jn. 1:14, "The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Jn. 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

1 Jn. 4:9, "God has sent his one and only Son into the world..."

Col. 1:15, "[Christ] who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."

Arians viewed Christ as the chief created being through whom everything else was created. They believed him to be *homoiousios* (of similar substance or essence) to the Father, and as the "preeminent one, having all the rights of the first born", but not as equal to the Father.

So, although Arius considered Christ divine in a certain sense of the word, and referred to him as the Logos, the Son and the Only Begotten, he did not regard him as God in the full sense of the word. Contemporary Jehovah's Witnesses hold to a view of Christ which is close to Arianism.

The council of Nicea (325 A.D.) denounced Arianism, stating that Christ is *homoousios* (of the same substance) as the Father. Running street battles were fought in Constantinople in the early 4th century over whether to include that middle "i" or not!

The church of the 3rd and 4th centuries recognized the importance of rightly defining the relationship between Jesus' divinity and his humanity. They fought over the issue for over a century! In the 4th century Gregory of Nyssa complained that he could not go anywhere without some tradesperson wanting to debate about the nature of the Son of God. "If you ask for change someone philosophises to you on the begotten and the unbegotten. If you ask for the price of bread you are told, 'the Father is greater and the Son is inferior. If you ask, 'is the bath ready?' someone answers, 'the Son was created from nothing!'"

2.3. Apollinarianism

The Apollinarians denied the totality of Christ's human nature by holding that Christ had no human mind and spirit. According to Apollinaris, the bishop of Laodicea (circa 360 A.D.), Jesus' soul and body were human but his mind and spirit were divine. In other words, the divine Son provided the human Christ with a rational human mind and spirit: Jesus was "God in a bod".

This teaching denies the full human nature of Christ by denying that he had a human spirit and mind as well as a human body. It also involves an awkward division of the human mind and soul.

2.4. Nestorianism

The Nestorians taught that Christ was a single being who consisted of two distinct, separate persons.

According to Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople (circa 428 A.D.), Christ was, in effect, a dual personality consisting of the Logos, or Christ's divine personality, and the human person, Jesus. He was a human being and a divine person in one body. He was a man whom God had filled, a man in whom the *logos* dwelled.

Nestorianism undermines the idea that Christ was single being with two natures, human and divine, which were joined without mixing in a hypostatic union, as the orthodox Christian position came to be called (see below).

The Nestorian church (also known as The Church of the East, or the Eastern Syrian Church) continues to exist today.

2.5. Monophysitism (sometimes known as Eutychianism)

Monophysites deny the distinction between Christ's two natures. It was first taught by Eutychus of Constantinople (378-454 A.D.). It is the opposite extreme of Nestorianism: Christ is presented as having had just one nature and will which consisted of a co-mingling of the divine and the human so that it constituted a third nature.

In other words, Christ possessed a new kind of nature, a mixture of some divinity and some humanity. (Greek: *monos* = one + *physis* = nature).

It denies the fact that Christ had two natures and two wills, human and divine, which operated in perfect harmony.

The Monophysite position is held today by the Egyptian Coptic church as well as the Assyrian and Mar Thoma churches.

2.6. Adoptionism

Adoptionism holds that the *logos* adopted the human state for a limited period of time. Put another way, the divine Christ simply adopted the human Christ for the duration of his human existence. It denies the fact that once begotten Christ's humanity is forever.

2.7. Ebionites

The Ebionites denied Christ's deity. These were early Judaizers. The Ebionites arose among early 2nd century Jewish Christians who held that the Mosaic law and other Jewish identity markers remained obligatory. They rejected the teachings of Paul because of his rejection of the law. They were,

essentially, lightly Christianized Pharisees who rejected the deity of Christ because in their minds it contradicted monotheism. They believed that at baptism the power and influence of God descended on the man Jesus, and thus he became the Christ. Near the end of his life the Christ withdrew from the person of Jesus again.

Islam could be considered a modern version Ebionitism in that it embraces monotheism and the law while rejecting the deity of Christ.

2.8. Kenosis theory

The kenosis theory holds that the divine Christ voluntarily emptied himself of key aspects of his divinity while on earth. First espoused by a German theologian Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875), it is a misinterpretation of Phil 2:6-11.

Phil. 2:6-7, "Christ Jesus who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men."

On the basis of this verse the kenosis theory holds that Jesus chose to "let go of", or "empty himself" (kenosis), of certain aspects of divinity in order to become truly human.

The danger of suggesting that Jesus "emptied himself" of certain aspects of divinity is that it can lead to the conclusion that he was less than fully divine.

The line in one of Wesley's hymn stating that Christ "emptied himself of all but love" can be said to reflect the kenosis theory-- though that was not what Wesley had in mind!

In the Philippians 2 passage we see Jesus giving up his heavenly status and privilege, the "glory he shared with the father before the word was made" (Jn. 17:5). He gave up the riches he had and "for our sake became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9). In that sense he "made himself nothing" (Phil 2:7 NIV).

See Q. 7 regarding the nature of Christ's state of humiliation.

3. **Why does the church insist that Jesus Christ is fully God?**

Because it is essential to the doctrine of salvation. This subject is so important I want to overwhelm you with Biblical proof. You must be utterly convinced that the deity of Christ is biblical if you consider yourself a genuine Christian.

3.1. The Bible states that it is so

a. Quick go-to verses

1 Jn. 5:20, *"We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we know him who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."*

Ti. 2:13, *"...looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."*

b. The Bible does not, however, teach it systematically

Like the doctrine of the Trinity, the Bible's teaching on the deity of Christ is like a puzzle whose numerous pieces are scattered all over the NT. When you piece them together you get an amazing picture of Jesus as the second person of the Trinity. The reason it is not presented systematically in the NT seems to be because it appeared so self-evident to the apostles after Christ's resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost that they felt no need to teach it systematically.

It took time for the church to put the pieces together and come up with formal terms which describe the picture which emerged: "hypostatic union" and "trinity".

c. When piecing the Biblical evidence together in a systematic way it is very important to note the difference between pre-resurrection descriptions (i.e. descriptions of Christ during his state of humility) and descriptions of Christ in his state of exaltation

Mixing these descriptions (often done, even in otherwise sound theological books – probably out of fear of being accused of adhering to the kenosis theory – creates conflicted impressions about Jesus in his state of humility.

The pre-resurrection Christ had limitations which the post-resurrection Christ did not have (as in, how could he develop and grow in wisdom? Did he know everything? etc.). As we will see, the Bible clearly teaches that although he voluntarily limited himself while in his state of humiliation, he was no less deity as a result.

d. There was a progression of understanding in the minds of the disciples

This progression is faithfully reflected in the Bible, particularly when you compare the disciples' understanding in gospels with what they taught later, in their epistles.

3.2. The Bible teaches the pre-existence of Jesus as the *logos* (word) of God

Jn. 1:1-2, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God."*

In the 1st century the word *logos* was used in three ways:

a. Greek use of *logos*

The use of the word *logos* in a philosophical sense had a long history before its use in John's gospel. In Greek thought the *logos* was the unifying principle, the law or reason, which accounted for the stable pattern in the ever-changing world.

In the 6th century B.C. a Greek philosopher named Heraclitus noted that it is impossible to step into the same river twice—with your second step the river has flowed on; it is a different river. To him, and to many philosophers after him, all of life is like that; it is in perpetual change. The reason life is not chaos, they affirmed, is because the change we see is not random. It is ordered. This means that there must be a divine “reason” or “word” that controls it. And they used the word “logos” to identify this controlling word. For Heraclitus and those after him the *logos* was nothing less than the mind of God controlling the world and all men.

Years later the philosopher Plato is thought to have turned to the group of philosophers and students around him and said, “It may be that someday there will come forth from God a Word, a Logos, who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain.”

“Yes,” says the apostle John. “The Logos has come in Jesus Christ...”

Boice, *John: An Expository Commentary*, p. 34-35.

b. OT sense of the “word” as the creative word of God

Gen 1:1, “*And God said...*”.

Psa. 33:6, “*By the word of the LORD were the heavens made.*”

See also Psa. 107:19-20; 147:15-20; Isa. 55:10-11.

c. John’s use of the word *logos*

In Jn. 1:1, “*The word was God*”, the Greek structure is *theos o logos* “God was the word” (i.e., not “a god”).

In Greek a name usually has the definite article, so God is usually *ho theos*. Some have argued that because *theos* here has no article, John is not referring to God as a specific being, but that he is referring to the qualities of “god-ness” or divinity. Therefore, they argue, the *logos* was not personally God, but simply divine. Today this position is held by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

But there is another Greek word for divine, *theios* (there is that middle “i” again!). Furthermore, there are other places where the predicate noun has no article and yet is specific.

Jn. 1:49, “*Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are (the) Son of God!”*”

So in Jn. 1:1 John is stating very carefully that the *logos* is God and yet he is not all that there is of the Godhead, but that the divinity that belongs to the rest of the Godhead also belongs to the Word, i.e., Christ.

3.3. The Bible gives numerous divine names to Jesus

a. God

Jn. 1:1, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

Jn. 1:18, *"No one has ever seen God; but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."* (NIV)

Jn. 20:28, *"Thomas said to him (i.e. to Jesus), 'My Lord and my God.'"*

Rom. 9:5, *"Theirs [i.e. from the Jews] are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."* (NIV)

Ti. 2:13, *"We wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."* (NIV)

Heb. 1:8, *"But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.'"*

2 Pet. 1:1, *"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ."*

1 Jn. 5:20, *"We are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."*

b. The Son of God

Sons (or children) of God can refer to Christians by virtue of the doctrine of adoption. See ch. XIV.

Mat. 5:9, *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."*

Rom. 8:14, *"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are children of God."*

Rom. 8:19, *"The creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed."*

Gal. 3:26, *"You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus."*

When the phrase "Son of God" is used to describe Jesus, however, it becomes clear that it has a very different meaning, and was understood as such by those addressed:

Mat. 14:33, "Those who were in the boat came and worshiped him, saying, 'You are truly the Son of God!'"

Lk. 22:70, "They all said, 'Are you then the Son of God?' He said to them, "You say it, because I am.""

Jn. 19:7, "The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.'"

c. Immanuel

Mat. 1:23, quoting Isa. 7:14. "The virgin shall be with child and shall give birth to a son, and shall call him Immanuel – which being interpreted means 'God with us.'"

d. The first and the last / the Alpha and Omega

Rev. 22:13, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

Compare with Rev. 1:8, where the same words are spoken by "the Lord God".

e. The Lord (Jehovah or Yahweh)

Several NT passages refer to Jesus as *kurios*, the Greek word for 'lord'. It is the equivalent of the Hebrew *adonai* in the OT. Both *adonai* and *kurios* can mean no more than master, the one in charge. Hence we should not take every NT example of *kurios* as a proof of the deity of Christ. English versions correctly sometimes translate it as sir, whether or not it is said to Jesus. (See Jn. 12:21, Jn. 4:11, etc.)

But *adonai* became closely connected with YHWH in Hebrew thinking. In the Septuagint (Greek) version of the OT, YHWH is translated with *kurios*. When a NT believer used the word *kurios* his mind connected the word to the concept of YHWH, the God of Israel.

Lk. 2:11, "For there is born to you today, in David's city, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Napoleon instituted family names across Europe, which is why many Europeans have ridiculous last names; they didn't think the innovation would last. In the Bible names are often an important clue with respect to the character or nature of the individual involved. Jesus also has two names: Jesus, meaning "YHWH saves" and Messiah, meaning "anointed one". The second name refers to him fulfilling the messianic expectation of the Old Covenant (Testament).

Ac. 20:28, *“Take heed, therefore, to yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the assembly of the Lord and God which he purchased with his own blood.”*

1 Cor. 8:6, *“Yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we live through him.”*

Rev. 19:16, *“He [i.e. Christ] has on his garment and on his thigh a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”*

See also Mat. 3:3, 22:44

3.4. The Bible describes Christ as the one who reveals God, and who must be granted equal honour with him

Jn. 5:23, *“...that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”*

Jn. 14:9-11, *“Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I tell you, I speak not from myself; but the Father who lives in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me.”*

Col. 1:19, *“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”* (NIV)

Col. 2:9, *“For in him all the fullness of deity dwells bodily.”* (Note the present tense in a letter written long after Christ’s ascension)

3.5. The Bible ascribes attributes unique to God to Jesus Christ as well

Note that almost all of these verses refer to Christ’s post- resurrection state, not to his state of humility. Although he never ceased possessing such attributes as eternity, holiness, love, mercy, righteousness, etc, he did not normally make use of his omniscience or omnipresence or omnipotence in his state of humility.

The Bible teaches that during his state of humility his ability to do miracles were effected through the Holy Spirit – though there were exceptions when, for example, he wanted to prove his deity. He lived life on earth prior to his resurrection in utter dependence on God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

We will unpack the relationship between Christ’s humanity and his deity when we look at the nature of the “hypostatic union” between Christ’s human and divine natures in question 5.

a. Christ is eternal

Jn. 1:1-2, See above.

Jn. 8:58, "Jesus said to them, "Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM."

Col. 1:17, "He (i.e. Christ) is before all things and in him all things are held together."

Heb. 1:8, "But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever."

Heb. 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

Rev. 22:13, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

b. Christ is omnipotent

Col. 1:17, "And he is before all things, and in him all things are held together."

1 Cor. 8:6, "yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we live through him."

Mat. 28:18, "Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" (Note the tenses in this post-resurrection statement.)

Jn. 17:2, "He (Jesus) said, 'Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may also glorify you; even as you gave him authority over all flesh, he will give eternal life to all whom you have given him.'"

Heb. 1:3, "His Son (i.e. Christ) is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power."

He has/had authority over the inanimate forces of nature: think of him calming a storm (Mat. 8:23-27).

He also has authority over the angelic and demonic realms. For instance, he casts out a demon in Lk. 4:35-41.

1 Pet. 3:22, "Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him." (NIV)

Eph. 1:20-22, "He (God) raised him (Jesus) from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things for the church."

c. Christ is omniscient

Jn. 2:24-25, *"Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew everyone, and because he did not need for anyone to testify concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man."*

Col. 2:3, *"Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden."*

Jn. 16:30, *"Now we know that you know all things, and do not need for anyone to question you. By this we believe that you came from God."*

Rev. 1:1, *"This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things which must happen soon."* (Note how God restored Christ to full omniscience after his resurrection).

Rev. 2:23, *"I am he who searches the minds and hearts. I will give to each one of you according to your deeds."*

d. Christ is omnipresent

Mat. 18:20, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the middle of them."*

Mat. 28:20, *"Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

e. Christ is immutable (i.e. unchangeable)

Heb. 1:12, *"You are the same, and your years will have no end."* (NIV)

Heb. 13:8, *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*

f. Christ is infallible

This was true of Christ in his state of humility as well; note Christ's affirmation of dependency on God the Father (more about this later).

Jn. 12:49-50, *"For I spoke not from myself, but the Father who sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. I know that his commandment is eternal life. The things therefore which I speak, even as the Father has said to me, so I speak."*

Jn. 14:6, *"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life.'"*

g. Christ is sovereign

These are all post-resurrection references:

Phil. 2:9-11, *"Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

Rev. 19:16, "He has on his garment and on his thigh a name written, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.'"

Mat. 25:31, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory."

h. Christ is perfect in holiness

This was true of Christ in his state of humility as well.

Lk. 4:34, "The demon possessed man cried out, "Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God." (NIV)

1 Pet. 2:22, "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth." (NIV)

i. Christ is perfect in righteousness

1 Cor. 1:30, "Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."

Heb. 1:9, "You (Christ) have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity."

j. Christ is perfect in faithfulness

Rev. 1:5, "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness."

k. Christ is perfect in love, which includes such qualities as mercy, compassion, grace and goodness.

Jn. 15:9-10, "Even as the Father has loved me, I also have loved you. Remain in my love even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and remain in his love."

1 Jn. 3:16, "By this we know love, because he (Christ) laid down his life for us."

l. Christ is the co-creator and co-sustainer of all things

He created, sustains and renews the heavens and the earth.

Jn. 1:3, "All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made."

Col. 1:15-17, "(Christ) who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible... all things have been created through him, and for him... in him all things are held together."

Heb. 1:3, "His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purified us of our sins."

Heb. 1:10-12, *"You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you continue; they will all grow old like a garment, you will roll the up like a mantle and they will be changed."*

Rev. 21:5, *"He who sits on the throne (referring to Jesus) said, "Behold, I am making all things new."*

m. Worship was rendered to and accepted by Christ

Jesus accepted worship from both angels and people. Remember, the 1st century Jews were the world's strictest monotheists at the time!

Heb. 1:6, *"When he (i.e. God) again brings the firstborn (i.e. Jesus Christ) into the world he says, "Let all the angels of God worship him."*

Rev. 5:11-12, *"I saw, and I heard something like a voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who has been killed to receive the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing!"*

Mat. 28:16-17, *"When they saw him, they bowed down to him."*

Lk. 24:51-52, *"They worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."*

Jn. 9:38, *"He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him."*

Phil. 2:9-11, *"Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

n. Baptism is to be administered in the name of the triune God, with the Son at the center

See: Mat. 28:18-20; Ac. 2:34-36.

3.6. Jesus' own claims and affirmations of deity

a. He claimed to be one with God the Father

Jn. 5:22-23, *"The Father judges no one, but he has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him."*

Jn. 10:30, *"I and the Father are one."*

Jn. 10:38, *"The Father is in me and I in the Father."*

Jn. 14:9-11, *"He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I tell you, I speak not from myself; but the Father who lives in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me."*

b. He claimed God was his father

Note that he never acknowledged Joseph as his father.

Lk. 2:49, *"And he (the boy Jesus) said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'"* What self-awareness. Where did that come from?

c. The 'I am' sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel

Jn. 8:57, 58, *"The Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?'"* Jesus said to them, *"Most certainly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am."*

This statement must be seen in the light of Ex. 3:14: *"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM,' and he said, 'You shall tell the children of Israel this: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*

See also the seven "I am" sayings of John's Gospel. He claimed to be everything that YHWH was in the Old Testament.

d. He claimed to be the "Son of Man"

This was Jesus' own preferred title for himself, recorded 84 times in the gospels. The OT background to this phrase is Dan. 7:13-14, which speaks of someone of heavenly origin being given eternal rule over the whole world.

Note the reaction of the Jewish council to Jesus' use of the term:

Mat. 26:64-65, *"Jesus said to him, 'You have said it. Nevertheless, I tell you, after this you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of the sky.'"* Then the high priest tore his clothing, saying, *"He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Behold, now you have heard his blasphemy."*

e. He claimed to be eternal

Jn. 8:58, *"Jesus said to them, 'Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM.'"*

Mat. 28:20, *"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

f. He and the apostles claimed he could forgive people their sins

Mat. 9:6, *“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” (then he said to the paralytic), “Get up, and take up your mat, and go up to your house.”*

Lk. 5:20, *“Seeing their faith, he said to him, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.”*

Ac. 5:31, *“God exalted him with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins.”*

Col. 3:13, *“Even as Christ forgave you, so you also do.”*

g. He raised people from the dead, and promises to do so to everyone at his second coming

Jn. 11:25-26, *“Jesus said to her (after having raised Lazarus from the dead), “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will still live, even if he dies. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”*

Phil. 3:21, *“The Lord Jesus will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory.”*

See also John 5:25-27.

h. He claimed that he would judge the world

Mat. 25:31-32, *“But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”*

Jn. 5:22, *“The Father judges no one, but he has given all judgment to the Son.”*

Jn. 5:27-29, *“He also gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is the son of man. Do not marvel at this, for the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice, and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.”*

Ac. 17:31, *“He has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained; of which he has given assurance to all men, in that he has raised him from the dead.” (Note use of the word “man”; once made flesh Christ retains it forever.)*

2 Cor. 5:10, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” (ESV)*

2 Tim. 4:1, *“The Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing.”*

i. He claimed to be able to give eternal life

Jn. 10:27-28, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."

Jn. 17:1-2, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may also glorify you; even as you gave him authority over all flesh, he will give eternal life to all whom you have given him."

4. Why is Christ's full deity so important?

It is very important because it is an essential part of the Bible's teaching on the nature of God's plan to save people from their sin through the penal, substitutionary atonement Christ effected through his life and death. He had to be fully God for his sacrifice to be of limitless value as a substitute for all sin and for all eternity. That is why the early church fought so hard to get this particular doctrine right.

In spite of overwhelming Scriptural proof and the need for it from a soteriological (salvation) perspective, it is a doctrine commonly denied by Unitarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and liberal scholars like John Hick and others.

Muslims also deny the deity of Christ.

Quran, Sura 3:64, Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah. that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah."

4.1. The deity of Christ makes God knowable

Because of the deity of Christ we can know the truth about who God is; it is possible to know what he is like. In fact, apart from Jesus Christ, God remains unknowable. He might be the God of the philosophers, of the mystics, of Plato's ruminations – who knows? If, however, Jesus Christ is divine, then we can know what God is like by studying the life and works of Christ as recorded in the Bible.

Jn. 14:8-10, Jesus said, "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on, you know him, and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I tell you, I speak not from myself; but the Father who lives in me does his works."

4.2. The deity of Christ means that God was always like Jesus Christ

If the Word was with God before time began, if God's Word is part of the eternal scheme of things, it means that God was always like Jesus. Sometimes we tend to think of God as just and holy and stern and avenging; and we tend to think that something that Jesus did changed God's anger into love and altered God's attitude to men. The New Testament knows nothing of that idea. The whole NT tells us that God has always been like Jesus... What Jesus did was open a window in time that we might see the eternal and unchanging love of God.

Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Vol 1. p. 15.

4.3. The deity of Christ means that Jesus' sacrifice was legally acceptable by God

We will unpack this more when we look at penal substitutionary atonement (see Ch. XIII). Suffice it to say for now that by virtue of his divinity Jesus Christ's personal worth is infinite. As a result he is able to satisfy the demands of God's justice not just for a single person, but for a great multitude of sinners in the course of all of history, and to do so within a limited period of time.

When presenting or defending the Gospel, and when helping uncertain new Christians, we must be able to give a clear biblical account of Christ's deity. Only the doctrine of the deity of Christ guards Christianity against pluralism, which claims that "all religions lead to God", or that the same God is worshipped in all religions. A concept of God which recognizes Jesus as divine and co-equal with God is a fundamentally different concept from any other ideas about God.

5. What is meant by the phrase "Christ's state of humility"?

For the sake of our salvation Christ became incarnate (took on human nature), laying aside the independent exercise of his divine power and attributes, and submitting himself to the Father's will and plan. Yet he never ceased to be fully God. Upon his resurrection from the dead he re-asserted all his divine attributes.

In other words, when Jesus became a man he voluntarily set aside some of his divine prerogatives, as a result of which we see differences in some of the divine attributes as displayed in Christ's state of humility and in his post-resurrection state of glory and exaltation.

Phil. 2:5-7, *“Have this in your mind, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.”*

During his time on earth Jesus generally limited his divine power to that which was available to him as a perfect human being in perfect fellowship with God, and who was directed and empowered by God’s Holy Spirit.

This is no doubt one of the reasons why he was in constant communication with God the Father. The Bible attributes his ability to perform miracles to the Holy Spirit.

Mat. 12:28, *“But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then God’s Kingdom has come upon you.”*

Ac. 10:38, *“God anointed him (Jesus of Nazareth) with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”*

That also explains why he did not know certain things during his state of humility (Mat. 24:36: *“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”*), and could promise his disciples that they would be able to do even greater things than he had done (Jn. 14:12).

It was as if he had deactivated these attributes. He didn’t cease to possess them, but he ceased making use of them for the time being. (Though there were a few times when he seemed to draw from them to prove his deity – like when he knew Nathanael was sitting under a fig tree. John 1:48).

Heb. 2:9, *“we see him [i.e. Christ] who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus.”* (NIV)

This quote, found in Asia Minor, was chiselled in marble in Old Latin:

I am what I was: God

I was not what I am: Man

I am now called both: God and man.

J. Oswald Sanders, p. 27, *The Incomparable Christ*, Moody Classics, Chicago, IL. 2009

Calvin on the humility of Christ

“For we know that in Christ the two natures were united into one person in such a manner that each retained its own properties; and more especially the divine nature was in a state of repose, and did not at all exert itself, whenever it was necessary that the human nature should act separately, according to what was peculiar to itself, in discharging the office of mediator. There would be no impropriety, therefore in saying that Christ, who knew all things, was ignorant of something in respect of his perception as a man; for otherwise he could not have been liable to grief and anxiety, and could not have been like us”

Calvin writes in his commentary on Philippians 2:7: “Christ, indeed, could not divest himself of Godhead; but he kept it concealed for a time, that it might not be seen, under the weakness of the flesh. Hence he laid aside his glory in the view of men, not by lessening it, but by concealing it.”

6. How is unity of the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ expressed?

The unity of Christ’s humanity and deity is expressed using the Greek word *hypostasis*, which means “underlying part, essential principle” (as opposed to mere attribute). In theology the term hypostatic union refers to the inseparable union of Christ’s human and divine natures in his one person. It holds that his human and divine natures are distinguishable but not divisible. They are inseparably bound so that in Christ they constitute one person.

Affirming the biblical witness to the hypostatic union is more important than being able to articulate a metaphysical model that can make sense of it. It is “rather to be adored than inquired into.”

We adore it because in the union of the two natures Christ formed the one and only perfect mediator between a holy God and sinful man. He could bridge the gap as a perfect man. He could stand in the place of man, but as full deity his personal worth was infinite, thus enabling him to stand in the place of many people. Only the miracle of the hypostatic union, the union of two natures in one person made this possible.

The church has tried to define (not explain) the hypostatic union in several formulations:

6.1. The Nicene formulation (325, 381 A.D.)

It was written during a council called by emperor Constantine to unify the new Christian Roman Empire that had been severely divided Arianism.

It states that “*we believe... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father*”

The Emperor hoped that a unified expression of Christianity would be the glue that held his empire together.

The Nicene formulation became the benchmark for all orthodox belief.

6.2. The Chalcedon Formulation (451 A.D.)

The Council of Chalcedon met to resolve the Monophysite controversy in which Eutyches had refused to confess the existence of two distinct natures in Christ. It summarizes the Church's teaching on the natures of Christ largely in negative terms.

We apprehend this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only-begotten -- in two natures; and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the "properties" of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one "person" and in one reality {hypostasis}. They are not divided or cut into two persons, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Word {Logos} of God, the Lord Jesus Christ

7. **Why do Christians insist that Jesus is fully man?**

The early church had no trouble believing in the deity of Christ. Very influential (neo)platonist Greek thinking at that time held that there were different levels of existence, i.e. God as pure spirit at the top, followed consecutively by "heavenly beings", then people, mammals, slugs, etc. It was considered inconceivable that pure spirit could remain pure in a lower category of existence, such as an enfleshed human. From very early on, even in later NT epistles, we see the early church fighting this neo-platonist trend to de-humanize Jesus.

Non-Christians today typically do not accept the divine nature of Christ, but Christians can underrate his humanity. Because they rightly emphasize the wonder of his deity some come to think of him as a god walking around in the guise of human form. The "God in a bod" model! (i.e. Apollinarianism).

Christians must, however, believe that Jesus was fully man:

7.1. Because the Bible teaches it!

1 Tim. 3:16, *"Without controversy, the mystery of godliness is great: God was revealed in the flesh, justified by the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, and received up in glory."*

a. He was born of a woman

Jesus never acknowledged Joseph as his biological father (though he was important as his “adoptive” father), but he acknowledged Mary as his mother. Is she the *theotokos*? (i.e. mother of God?). Is she also the *anthrotokos*? (i.e. mother of man?).

Note his genealogies in Mat. 1:18-23, 2:11 through his adoptive father Joseph, and in Lk. 1:30-33 through Mary all the way back to Adam.

Gal. 4:4, *“When the fullness of the time came, God sent out his Son, born to a woman...”*

b. He experienced normal human development

Lk. 2:40, *“The child was growing, and was becoming strong in spirit, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.”*

Lk. 2:52, *“Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”*

Heb. 5:8, *“Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered.”*

c. He worked as a tradesman

Mk. 6:3, *“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?”*

His speciality seemed to be yokes. *“For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”*, he said (Mat. 11:30). There was no-one in that crowd in his home region of Galilee who complained that his animal suffered as a result of a yoke Jesus had made!

d. He was (and still remains!) a man; he has a full human nature

After his resurrection he encouraged his disciples saying, *“See my hands and my feet, that it is truly me. Touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have”* (Lk. 24:39). He then ascended bodily into heaven, from which he will return bodily (Ac. 1:9).

When Jesus became a human being, he became one for the rest of eternity. This means that:

- i. He has a human spirit (that aspect of our being which needs to be regenerated) which in Jesus’ case was always fully alive and “in tune with” God, his heavenly father.

Lk. 23:46, *“Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” Having said this, he breathed his last.”*

Mk. 2:8, *"Immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you reason these things in your hearts?"*

Mk. 8:12, *"And he sighed deeply in his spirit..."*

Jn. 11:33, *"He groaned in the spirit and was troubled."*

Jn. 13:21, *"When Jesus had said this, he was troubled in spirit..."*

ii. He has a human soul (i.e. mind, will, emotions)

Mat. 23:37, *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!"* (Jesus expressing frustration here?)

Note the full range of emotions Christ experienced.

Mat. 26:38; Mk. 14:34, *"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death."*

Mk. 3:5, *"When he had looked around at them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their hearts."*

Mk. 6:6, *"He marvelled because of their unbelief."*

Lk. 7:9, *"When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned and said to the multitude who followed him, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith, no, not in Israel."*

Jn. 11:35, *"Jesus wept."*

Jn. 12:27, *"Now is my soul troubled..."*

Jn. 13:23, *"One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was at the table, leaning against Jesus' breast."*

Jn. 15:11, *"I have spoken these things to you, that my joy may remain in you."*

Isa. 53:10, *"Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied."*

iii. He has a human body of flesh, bones, muscles, sinews, etc.

In other words, he is limited locally and, while he was in his state of humility, by the natural limitations of the human body.

Mat. 4:2, *"He was hungry."* (see also Mat. 21:18)

Mat. 8:24, *"He was asleep."*

THE NATURE, PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

Lk. 23:52, *"He [Joseph of Arimathea] took it [Jesus' body] down, and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb that was cut in stone, where no one had ever been laid."*

Jn. 1:14, *"The Word became flesh and lived among us"*

Jn. 4:6-7, *"Jesus therefore, being tired from his journey, sat down by the well.... A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (see also John 19:28).*

Heb. 2:14, *"Since then the children have shared in flesh and blood, he also himself in the same way partook of the same."*

Heb. 10:5, 10, *"When Christ came into the world, he said... a body have you prepared for me." (NIV)*

1 Jn. 1:1, 3, *"That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we saw, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life ... which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us."*

(Note: this statement, written long after Jesus' ascension, affirms that after his resurrection Jesus still had a body of flesh and bones. See below)

e. He experienced all the limitations and temptations of a fallen human body while in his state of humility

Note that his resurrected, glorified body does not have these limitations – and neither will ours!

He was tempted by Satan, Mat. 4:1-11. (Not from his own nature!)

Lk. 22:28, *"You are those who have continued with me in my trials."*

Heb. 2:10, 18, *"For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering... For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (NIV)*

Heb. 4:15, *"We do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin."*

f. He was limited in terms of his human knowledge

Mk. 13:32 *"Of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (see also Mat. 24:36)*

Mk. 5:30, "Jesus, perceiving in himself that the power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd, and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

Mk. 11:12-13, "When they had come out from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came to see if perhaps he might find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs."

Lk. 2:52, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and men." Jesus learned stuff!

Lk. 7:9, "When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned and said to the multitude who followed him, said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith, no, not in Israel."

Jn. 11:34, "Jesus said, "Where have you laid him?" They told him him, "Lord, come and see."

Here is something to think about: did Jesus ever make a mistake answering a math question when he was in school as a child?

g. He lived in total dependence on his heavenly father, as seen in his prayer life and teachings

He had a full religious life. He attended the synagogue regularly (Luke 4:16), and prayed regularly for guidance, strength, etc.

Mat. 14:23, "After he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain by himself to pray."

Mat. 26:36, "Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go there and pray."

Mk. 1:35, "Early in the morning, while it was still dark, he rose up and went out, and departed into a deserted place, and prayed there."

Mk. 6:46, "And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray."

Lk. 11:1, "When he finished praying in a certain place, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray..."

Lk. 22:44, "Being in agony he prayed more earnestly."

Jn. 17:1, "Jesus said these things, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, "Father, the time has come."

The Bible even describes how Jesus prayed

Heb. 5:7, *"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence."* (NIV)

See also Mk. 6:46; 9:29; 14:32; Lk. 5:16; 6:12; 9:28.

Jesus' ministry was carried out in dependence on the other persons of the Trinity.

Jn. 7:16, *"Jesus therefore answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me'."*

h. He experienced death

Lk. 23:46, *"Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!'"* Having said this, he breathed his last."

Heb. 2:9, *"We see him who has been made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for everyone."*

See also 1 Pet. 2:24.

i. After his resurrection – and even now in heaven – he remained a man

Lk. 24:39, *"See my hands and my feet, that it is truly me. Touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have."*

1 Tim. 2:5, *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*

Ac. 17:31, *"He [God] has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained; of which he has given assurance to all men, in that he has raised him from the dead."*

7.2. Christ's full humanity is of vital importance for salvation

a. Christ's humanity enabled him to die

The ability to die is undoubtedly one of the most important reasons for Christ's incarnation. His death is the focal point of salvation history; everything prior to it looked forward to it with anticipation, and everything after it looks back to it with hope.

Heb. 9:27-28, *"Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this, judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, without sin, to those who are eagerly waiting for him for salvation."*

Heb. 10:4-7, *“For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. Therefore when he (Christ) comes into the world, he says, ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but you (Father God) prepared a body for me. You had no pleasure in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of me) to do your will, O God.’”*

b. Christ’s humanity enabled him to be our perfect representative

Jesus Christ had to become our perfect representative in his life and death. In other words, Jesus Christ had to be fully man in order to be able to stand in for mankind as an acceptable sacrifice on their behalf. The doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement depends on it.

Heb. 2:17, *“Therefore he was obligated in all things to be made like his brothers, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people.”*

7.3. Christ’s full humanity is important for other reasons as well

a. Christ’s humanity enables him to sympathize with mankind

Because he is fully human he can sympathize with us because he shared our weakness and suffering. He can intercede effectively for us, and he can be the model of what a fully sanctified person should strive to be like.

Heb. 4:15-16, *“For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace for help in time of need.”*

b. Christ’s humanity enables him to be our example

Christ is the model of what a Christian should aspire to. We will look at this in greater depth under sanctification.

1 Peter 2:21, *“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps.”*

When we look at Jesus Christ in his humanity we begin to realise what poor reflections of what we could be we really are.

c. Christ’s humanity gives value to human life

In the course of history mankind has regarded life (notably other people’s lives) as cheap. Modern society cheapens it through abortion on demand.

It has been said of Indian Hinduism that all life there is sacred, except human life. The incarnation of Jesus Christ (God taking on flesh), along with the fact that God grants life in the first place, is a tremendous affirmation of the sanctity and value of life in God's eyes.

8. Does the Bible actually teach the virgin birth of Jesus?

Strictly speaking it was his conception, not his birth which was miraculous. However, the event is commonly referred to as the virgin birth.

The virgin birth was recorded by both Matthew and Luke, who rely on independent traditions for their material on this subject (they are clearly not drawing from the same source).

Mat. 1:18, *"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was like this; for after his mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit."*

Mat. 1:20, *"An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to yourself Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.'"*

Lk. 1:34-35. *"Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, seeing I am a virgin?' The angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore also the holy one who is born from you will be called the Son of God.'"*

Gal. 4:4 alludes to the Virgin Birth: *"God sent His Son, born of a woman."*

Rom. 1:3-4, *"Concerning his Son, who was born of the offspring of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."*

The normal Greek word for descendant is *sperma*, which means seed, and indicates descent through the male line. The ordinary Greek word for born is *gennetos*, as, for example in Mat. 11:11, where it is used of John the Baptist being born of a woman. However, both the Galatians and Romans passages use the word *genomenos*, which literally means "become, come to be", and is, as such, a Pauline allusion to the pre-existence of Christ.

In summary, Jesus' birth was the result of the Holy Spirit working within Mary's body. Mary was a vessel upon which God performed the miracle of the incarnation. This does not mean, however, that one can deny a physical connection between Mary and Jesus, as that would suggest Jesus was not truly human. Scripture teaches that Jesus had a fully physical body like ours which he received from Mary.

9. What are the common arguments against the virgin birth?

9.1. The virgin birth was a miracle, and therefore is not believable

If one *a-priori* discounts the possibility of miracles, one has to discount the virgin birth. Discounting the very idea of miracles is not so much a Christian problem as a problem for those who hold to the idea that miracles are totally impossible: *to be certain that miracles are impossible one would have to know absolutely everything*. The sceptic voicing his scepticism does not affect the written records.

The ancients were not gullible, as the story of the virgin birth strikingly illustrates: when Joseph discovered that his fiancée was pregnant, he decided to repudiate her because he knew just as well as a gynaecologist today that under normal circumstances women only have babies after they have had sexual intercourse with a man.

Note that Luke, who reported this event, was a physician.

9.2. The virgin birth was a variation of some ancient myths

Some suggest that the NT writers borrowed the idea from ancient Egyptian (Horus and Isis), Babylonian, Greek or Roman legends. However, the ancient myths on this subject are of an entirely different literary genre which include very strange additions – like gods involved in adultery. One version of the birth of the Greek god Dionysos/Bacchus states he was miraculously begotten by Zeus in the mortal woman Semele, but was taken from his mother's womb before the full period of gestation had expired, and completed his embryonic life in Zeus's thigh. As a result, Dionysos was considered to be half human and half divine -- born of a woman and also of a god.

As far as literature is concerned, the biblical accounts are simple narratives related without sensationalism and located in two clearly historical accounts. The fantasist nature of the ancient Egyptian, Greek, Babylonian and Roman tales provide a stark contrast to the sober Biblical account.

10. Why is the doctrine of the virgin conception so important?

10.1. Because the rest of the Bible teaches Jesus' pre-existence

Jn. 1:1, *"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God"*

Jn. 8:58, *"Jesus said to them, "Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM."*

Col.1:15-17, "[The Son] *who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things are held together.*"

If Joseph were his physical father then Jesus would only be a mere human being. He would have had his beginning in the first century A.D.

10.2. Because the rest of the Bible teaches that Jesus had a sinless nature

It appears that the sin nature is passed down from one generation to the next through the father.

Rom. 5:17,19, "*By the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man... For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners.*" (NIV)

Jesus had no sin nature, i.e., the inability not to sin was not in him. The virgin birth circumvented the transmission of the sin nature and allowed the second person of the eternal God to become a perfect man.

1 Pet. 2:22, "*He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth.*" (NIV)

1 Jn. 3:5, "*You know that he was revealed to take away our sins, and in him is no sin.*"

Heb. 7:26, "*For such a high priest was fitting for us: holy, guiltless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.*"

10.3. Because he had to become the perfect atoning sacrifice for sinful man

Only sacrifices without blemish were ever acceptable to God.

Ex. 12:5, "*Your lamb shall be without defect...*"

Mal. 1:13, "*When you bring injured, lame or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands? says the LORD.*" (NIV)

If Christ were defective in any way there would be no salvation, as he would not have been able to provide an acceptable atonement for the sins of mankind.

However, his supernatural entry into the world, his lack of a sinful nature making him subject to death as a result of the fall, and his sinless life meant he was "without spot or blemish" and could thus serve as an acceptable sacrifice for sins.

2 Cor. 5:21, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" (NIV)

Gal. 4:4-5, *“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent out his Son, born to a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of children.”*

10.4. Because Joseph was not allowed to be Jesus’ natural father since he was a descendant of king Jeconiah (Mat. 1:12)

Jeconiah’s blood line to the throne of David had been completely severed. No descendant of Jeconiah (also known as Jehoicahin) would be allowed to sit on David’s throne.

Jer. 22:28-30, *“Is this man Jehoiachin a despised, broken pot, an object no one wants? Why will he and his children be hurled out, cast into a land they do not know? O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the LORD says: “Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.” (NIV)*

Yet Jesus is called the son of David, and the prophets predicted that the Messiah would one day sit on David’s throne. This meant that Jesus was descended from king David, but not through the line of king Jeconiah. Jesus was a descendent of David through the line of Nathan, via Zerubbabel, to Mary, the husband of Joseph. He could, therefore, rightfully claim the throne of his forefather David.

10.5. Because the virgin birth underscores Christ’s uniqueness

No other person entered the world the way Jesus did. His unique nature affected all he did in the course of his sinless life. From his entry into the world through a humble virgin giving birth in a stable, until his resurrection and ascension, his life was a miracle.

11. Does the Bible actually teach that Jesus lived a human life without ever sinning?

Sinlessness is total conformity to God’s will in thought, word and deed. This is what Christ accomplished: he perfectly fulfilled the father’s will. He accomplished sinless perfection.

11.1. The Bible states plainly that Jesus was sinless

a. The testimony of angels and demons

Lk. 1:35, *“And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.” (NIV)*

Mk. 1:23-24, *“There was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, saying, “Ha! What do we have to do with you, Jesus, you Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know you who you are: the Holy One of God!” See also Luke 4:34.*

b. The prophetic testimony of the OT psalmists and prophets

Psa. 40:6-8, *“Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, “Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” (NIV)*

Jer. 23:5-6, *“Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will raise to David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name by which he shall be called: Yahweh our righteousness.”*

Isa. 53:10-11, *“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.” (NIV)*

c. The testimony of the law

Any sacrifice acceptable to God had to be without blemish and “most holy”.

Mal. 1:10, 13, *““Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors (to the temple), that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you,’ says Yahweh of Armies, ‘neither will I accept an offering at your hand... You have brought that which was taken by violence, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring the offering. Should I accept this at your hand?’ says Yahweh.”*

Heb. 9:13-14, *“For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify to the cleanness of the flesh: how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without defect to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”*

1 Pet. 1:18-19, *“You were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from the useless way of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a faultless and pure lamb, the blood of Christ.”*

See Ex. 12:5, 29:1, Lev. 4:3, 23, 28, 32; 22:21; Num. 19:2; 28:3, 9, 11.

d. The testimony of God from heaven

Mat. 3:17, *"Behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

Mat. 17:5, *"Behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."*

e. Jesus' testimony about himself

He was either telling the truth or had the most inflated ego of all time!

Jn. 8:28-29, *"Jesus therefore said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and I do nothing of myself, but as my Father taught me, I say these things. He who sent me is with me. The Father hasn't left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."*

Jn. 15:10, *"If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and remain in his love."*

Jn. 17:4, *"I glorified you on the earth. I have accomplished the work which you have given me to do."*

f. The testimony of the apostles

2 Cor. 5:21, *"For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

Heb. 4:15, *"For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin."*

Heb. 7:26-27, *"For such a high priest was fitting for us: holy, guiltless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who does not need, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices daily, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. For he did this once for all, when he offered up himself."*

1 Pet. 2:21-23, *"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps, who did not sin, "neither was deceit found in his mouth." Who, when he was cursed, did not curse back. When he suffered, did not threaten, but committed himself to him who judges righteously."*

1 Jn. 3:5, *"You know that he was revealed to take away our sins, and in him is no sin."*

g. Other implications and facts about Christ's sinlessness

- He never prayed for forgiveness for himself, nor did he ever ask anyone to do so.
- He never called God his saviour.
- There is no record of him sorrowing for his own sin.
- He frequented the temple often but never offered a sacrifice for sin on behalf of himself.
- He permitted people to think of him as sinless.
- Although he grew weary, tired and hungry there is no record of him ever being ill.
- Because he was without sin death would not have been his "natural lot" for "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 3:23) He laid down his life voluntarily (John 10:18; 19:30; Rom. 5:12-21).
- Because he was without sin the Holy Spirit could work through him "without measure" (John 3:34).

11.2. Jesus eagerly obeyed his heavenly father both in a positive and negative sense

In other words, he eagerly carried out God's will (positive) and did not break any of the commands (negative). He was "actively righteous".

Jn. 8:28-29, Jesus said, "*I always do the things that are pleasing to him [i.e. God the Father].*"

Jn. 8: 46, "*Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?*"

12. **Was it possible that Jesus could have sinned? After all, God cannot be tested, right? (Jam. 1:13-14)**

12.1. Issues this question raises:

- a. If Jesus could not sin, then isn't the idea of him being tempted meaningless?

Why tempt a being who is incapable of sinning?

For temptation to be real there must be some inward desire in the person tempted for temptation to appeal to. Is this not what Rom. 8:3 teaches: "*Christ was made in the likeness of sinful flesh*"?

If one is incapable of doing something you cannot tempt them to do it. For instance, you cannot tempt me to speak in Mongolian because I do not know a single word in that language.

- b. If Jesus could not sin, does this not mean he was incapable of choosing for himself instead of only doing his Father's will?

Does not his struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mat. 26:39) suggest he struggled at times with the father's will for him?

- c. If Jesus could not sin then how can we think of him as truly identifying with the rest of us human beings?

How would he be able to sympathize with sinful mankind in their temptations?

12.2. The nature of Christ's temptations

- a. Jesus was not tempted by a sinful human nature (which he did not have)

Heb. 4:15, *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."* (NIV)

In other words, because he had no sinful nature there was no evil in him, and thus he was not conflicted within himself the way we might be. He did not have the inner conflict which believers suffer (as in "I want to do the right thing/no, actually I don't want to do the right thing" see Rom. 7:14-18; Gal. 5:17; Jam. 1:14).

- b. God Himself tested Jesus

When God the father prepared a body for Jesus (Heb. 10:5) he prepared for him a body which would undergo all the suffering and limitations (opposition, weariness, frustrations, etc) common to man.

God also allowed Satan access to Jesus to tempt him.

Mat. 4:1, *"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."*

- c. Satan tempted Jesus

Satan sought ongoingly to get Jesus to follow his will instead of the father's will, thus seeking to force God the Father to reject him. After his three famous temptations at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, we read that Satan left Jesus, but only for a limited period of time: Lk. 4:13, *"And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time."*

There were times when Satan used others (even close friends) to tempt Jesus to stray from the path his father had set out for him.

Mat. 16:22-23, *"Peter took him aside, and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This will never be done to you.'" But he turned,*

and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me."

Satan, at least, must have been convinced there was a theoretical possibility that Jesus could be moved to sin in some area of life!

Note that Satan tested all three areas of Jesus' humanity. In other words, he was tested "in all points as we are" apart from sin (Mat. 4:1-11).

- At the physical level Jesus was tempted to satisfy his normal bodily needs by means of a miracle.
- At the level of the soul Jesus was tempted to presumption: that God would protect him if he did something rash.
- At the spiritual level Jesus was tempted to worship Satan.

In each case Christ conquered the temptation-from-without by referring to God's word, i.e., the written will of God available to all men. He did not draw from some kind of inner, divine power to help or enable him to overcome.

d. Jesus was tested in his pre-resurrection state of humility

His entire physical being revolted at the thought of the physical and mental agony he was about to suffer just prior to the crucifixion.

Lk. 22:41-44, "He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly." (NIV)

12.3. Jesus' temptations were real... but the outcome was not in doubt

They were real. In fact the sufferings caused by the temptations would have been felt more powerfully by one who is altogether holy and sinless than by those who are sinful. However, there was no chance of failure.

a. Christ himself had helped conceive the plan of salvation

Christ's death is described as "*the blood of the eternal covenant*" (Heb. 13:20). The triune God conceived the plan of salvation in eternity and had determined how it would end.

b. Christ knew that the end result would make it worth it all!

Heb. 12:1-2, "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy

that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (NIV)

12.4. The reasons why Jesus was tempted

- a. In order to develop fully as a human being so that he would be “perfect for the task” he was called to accomplish

Lk. 2:52, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.”

Heb. 5:8, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.” (NIV)

- b. In order to receive the approval of God the Father as a human being able to stand in the place of human beings

His was an active righteousness; he completely obeyed God’s law in our stead.

Mat. 3:17, “behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Mat. 17:5, “While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them. Behold, a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.’”

Lk. 9:35, “A voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!’”

See also Mk. 9:7

- c. In order to demonstrate what perfect humanity looks like

Christ was the first fruits of a new creation which did not respond to sin. Satan must have been baffled!

Col. 2:15, “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

- d. In order to serve as a merciful and sympathetic high priest on our behalf

Heb. 4:14-16, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace for help in time of need.”

He knows what we must endure and can supply strength and grace in our time of need. In fact, he bore the full brunt of Satan’s temptations, so his experience was much more intense than ours, for we give in before we bear the full force.

Heb. 2:18, *“For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.”*

13. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be sinless?

If he had not been sinless he would have had to die for his own sin. He would not have been able to redeem others, nor would he have been the full, perfect and final revelation of God to man.

13.1. He had to be sinless in order to live the law perfectly as our perfect substitute

By living a righteous life, he lived the life we should have lived. He not only died on our behalf, he also lived on our behalf, fulfilling all the demands of righteousness.

Mat. 5:17-18, *“Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished.”*

Rom. 10:4, *“For Christ is the fulfilment of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”*

Eph. 2:14-15, *“For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in the flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances.”*

Heb. 5:9, *“Having been made perfect, he became to all of those who obey him the author of eternal salvation.”*

13.2. He had to be sinless in order to die the death of the perfect, sinless sacrifice for us

1 Pet. 1:18-19, *“You were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from the useless way of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a faultless and pure lamb, the blood of Christ.”*

13.3. He had to be sinless in order to model the type of man Christians are to conform to

Christ is to be our role model, and Christ-likeness our goal.

1 Pet. 2:21, *“To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps.”*

1 Jn. 2:6, *“He who says he remains in him ought himself also to walk just like he walked.”*

Rom. 8:29, "For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

- He modelled perfect holiness: we are to "be holy as he is holy".
- He modelled perfect love: we are to "love as he loved".
- He modelled perfect faith: we are to "believe as he believed".
- He modelled perfect obedience to the father: we are to "obey as he obeyed".
- He modelled perfect humility: we are called to the meekness he modelled.
- He modelled perfect speech patterns: we are called to take him as our example in word.
- He modelled the ideal prayer life: we are called to pray as he prayed.
- He modelled the best teaching and preaching practises. We are to teach and preach as he did.

The only way we can grow in Christlikeness in this area is by the total identification with him in his death and resurrection (see Sanctification, ch. XIV).

14. Why was Jesus baptised if he was sinless?

John the Baptist, the man who baptised him, had the same question. In fact, he was quite taken aback that Jesus wanted to be baptised by him, for his was a baptism of repentance, of which Jesus had no need.

Mat. 3:13-15, "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan^a to John, to be baptized by him. But John would have hindered him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?" But Jesus, answering, said to him, "Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness."

14.1. Jesus' baptism affirmed his solidarity with sinful mankind

Jesus could have joined John the Baptist and called people to repentance. Instead, he got down to where sinful people were, identifying himself with them as part of the process of salvation which he had undertaken. Baptism here is a symbol of death.

14.2. Jesus' baptism was part of his fulfilling all the demands of the law

The phrase "*fulfill all righteousness*" (Mat. 3:15) means that Christ's perfect righteousness met all the requirements of the law for sinners who could never hope to do so on their own.

Although he had no sin of his own, the sin of mankind was imputed to him. Christ's fulfilment of all righteousness means he can provide it to all who come to him to exchange their sin for his righteousness: "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Because he fulfilled all the righteousness which mankind could not provide, his baptism became an occasion when the Father testified that he was pleased with the Son. The Son could become an acceptable sacrifice to the Father. God the Father's pleasure with the Son was affirmed by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him (Mat. 3:16-17). We have a clear picture of the three persons of the Trinity working for the redemption of those Jesus came to save.

14.3. Jesus' baptism modelled the OT order of atonement

On the Day of Atonement the High Priest immersed himself in water and washed, as would the regular priests before entering the temple before regular service. Baptism here is a symbol of purification.

Lev. 16:4; 23-24, "He [the high priest] shall bathe his body in water, and put them [the special clothes worn on the Day of Atonement] on... Aaron shall come into the Tent of Meeting, and shall take off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the Holy Place, and shall leave them there. Then he shall bathe himself in water in a holy place, and put on his garments, and come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people."

14.4. Jesus' baptism sets the stage for gentiles being joined with the Old Covenant community into a new body, the church

The Jews practiced baptism prior to the Christian era as a purification rite when they initiated converts into Judaism (along with circumcision and the offering of a sacrifice).

XII

The Death and Resurrection of Christ

"Christ died, rose, and lived again." (Rom. 14:9)



IN THIS CHAPTER we want to consider Christ's atoning work from a historical perspective: what happened in space and time? In the next chapter we look at the meaning of these facts, i.e., at the doctrine of soteriology, which pertains to the Bible's teaching about eternal salvation as effected by Christ.

The Christian faith depends on historical facts. The NT writers are clear that both the death and resurrection of Jesus were actual, factual, genuine, concrete, historical, physical, objective realities. They really happened in space and time. The centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ is marked by the twin celebrations of Good Friday [his death] and Easter Sunday [his resurrection].

1. How do non-Christians regard Christianity's claim that Jesus rose from the dead?

1.1. Liberal theologians

Liberal theology regards the death and resurrection of Jesus as mere religious myths or legends. Among theologically liberal Christians, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, it is common to use the concept of resurrection figuratively. For them the resurrection is a mere spiritual awakening. They use biblical words, but may believe no more than that the memory of Jesus continued to have some kind of beneficial influence on his disciples.

When witnessing to people who have been influenced by these views, it is important to make clear that we proclaim a historical, physical resurrection. You may want to attach the adjectives 'physical' or 'bodily' before 'resurrection'.

1.2. Common Muslim belief

According to the Qur'an Jesus was not crucified at all. Someone else (possibly Judas) took his place. Surah 4:156: "*Yet they slew him not and they crucified him not, but they had only his likeness*".

When witnessing to Muslims it is important to make clear that the man on the cross really was Jesus, and that when he was taken down from the cross he really was dead.

However, another reference in the Quran does seem to acknowledge Jesus' death. In Surat al Mariam 19:33 Jesus is purported to have said, "*So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again).*"

2. What are the known extra-biblical historical facts about Jesus' crucifixion?

2.1. Crucifixion was a common Roman form of execution for non-Romans

Crucifixion is probably one of the most painful, cruel ways devised by mankind to prolong torture as long as possible without having to physically apply it once the victim was nailed to the cross.

2.2. Extra-biblical historical references to Jesus' crucifixion

a. Jewish sources

These writers of the Talmud were Jews who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Although they were not Christians, they documented Christ's crucifixion.

Babylonian Talmud, b. Sanhedrin 43a:

"On the eve of the Passover Yeshu (Jesus) was hanged (or crucified). ... Since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover."

The Amoa Ulla (Ulla was a disciple of a famous rabbi called Youchanan, who lived in Palestine at the end of the 3rd century):

"And do you suppose that for Yeshu of Nazareth there was any right of appeal? He was a beguiler, and the Merciful One hath said: 'Thou shalt not spare neither shalt thou conceal him.'"

b. Roman Sources

Flavius Josephus (37- c. 100 A.D.) was a Jew, but he wrote for a Roman audience.

“About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.” *Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, Chapter 3.3.*

We will look at the authenticity of this passage when looking at the resurrection of Christ.

Cornelius Tacitus (56-circa 117 A.D.):

“Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.” *Annals, xv. 44*

Lucian of Samosata (125-180 A.D.) in *The Passing of Peregrinus*:

“The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains their contempt for death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.”

c. Early attestations of the darkness and earthquake which accompanied the death of Christ

Tertullian (155-240 A.D.), an early Christian apologist, noted that the fact that the earth turned dark at the time of Christ could be attested by consulting the annals and archives of his day:

“At the moment of Christ’s death, the light departed from the sun, and the land was darkened at noonday, which wonder is related in your own annals, and is preserved in your archives to this day.”²⁸

Julius Africanus was a third century historian and librarian to Emperor Alexander Severus. In his five volume *History of the World* (written circa 221), he quotes the now lost history of the eastern Mediterranean by Thallus, who wrote around the year 52 A.D.

“Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away the darkness as an eclipse of the sun – unreasonably as it seems to me.”²⁹

Phlegon, a Greek historian, wrote the following around 137 A.D.:

“In the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad (i.e., 33 A.D.) there was ‘the greatest eclipse of the sun’ and ‘it became night in the sixth hour of the day (i.e., noon) so that stars even appeared in the heavens. There was a great earthquake in Bithynia, and many things were overturned in Nicaea.”³⁰

Commenting on the accounts by Thallus and Phlegon, Africanus notes that,

“A most terrible darkness fell over all the world, the rocks were torn apart by an earthquake, and many places both in Judaea and the rest of the world were thrown down. In the third book of his Histories Thallus dismisses this darkness as a solar eclipse, unreasonably, as it seems to me. For the Hebrews celebrate the Passover on Luna 14, and what happened to the Saviour occurred one day before the Passover. But an eclipse of the sun takes place when the moon passes under the sun. The only time when this can happen is in the interval between the first day of the new moon and the last day of the old moon, when they are in conjunction. How then could one believe an eclipse took place when the moon was almost in opposition to the sun? So be it. Let what had happened beguile the masses, and let this

²⁸ Sanders, Oswald. *The Incomparable Christ*, Moody Publishers, 1982. p. 203.

²⁹ Habermas, Gary. *The Historical Jesus*, p. 196-7, College Press Publishing Company, 1996

³⁰ Maier, Paul. *Pontius Pilate* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1968), p. 366. Phlegon’s citation is a fragment from *Olympiades he Chronika* 13, ed. Otto Keller, *Rerum Naturalium Scriptores Graeci Minores*, 1 (Leipzig Teurber, 1877), p. 101.

wonderful sign to the world be considered a solar eclipse through an optical [illusion]. Phlegon records that during the reign of Tiberius Caesar there was a complete solar eclipse at full moon from the sixth to the ninth hour; it is clear that this is the one. But what have eclipses to do with an earthquake, rocks breaking apart, resurrection of the dead, and a universal disturbance of this nature?"³¹

In his work *Against Celcus* (2:23) Origen (184-253 A.D.) noted,

"And with regard to the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose kingship Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place, Phlegon too, I think, has written in the thirteenth or fourteenth book of his *Chronicles*" .³²

Jerome (342-420 A.D.) states that,

"Jesus Christ, according to the prophecies which had been foretold about him beforehand, came to his passion in the eighteenth year of Tiberius, at which time also we find these things written verbatim in other commentaries of the gentiles, that an eclipse of the sun happened, Bithynia was shaken by earthquake, and in the city of Nicaea many buildings collapsed, all of which agree with what occurred in the passion of the Savior. Indeed Phlegon, who is an excellent calculator of Olympiads, also writes about these things, writing thus in his thirteenth book."

"In the fourth year, however, of Olympiad 202, (i.e., 32/33 A.D.) an eclipse of the sun happened, greater and more excellent than any that had happened before it; at the sixth hour, day turned into dark night, so that the stars were seen in the sky, and an earthquake in Bithynia toppled many buildings of the city of Nicaea. These things [are according to] the aforementioned man."³³

³¹ George Syncellus, century IX, *Chronography* chapter 391, citing Julius Africanus, early century III (Greek text from Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, page 1157, Thallus history 1, and page 1165, Phlegon history 16b; English translation based on the online excerpt at the Tertullian Project.

See: <http://www.textexcavation.com/phlegontestimonium.html>

³² Origen, *AGAINST CELSUS* 2.33 (Greek text from Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, page 1165, Phlegon history 16d; English translation based on the online text at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library).

See: <http://www.textexcavation.com/phlegontestimonium.html>

³³ Jerome, Olympiad 202 (Latin text from Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, page 1165, Phlegon history 16a; English translation based on the online edition at the Tertullian Project.

See: <http://www.textexcavation.com/phlegontestimonium.html>

3. What other evidence is there that Jesus died and rose from the dead?

If true, Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead is the most important event in the history of mankind – which is why it is so important to establish its historicity.

Is Jesus who he said he was, and did he do what he said he would do: go to Jerusalem to be crucified and then, three days later, be raised from the dead? If so, Christianity is true. If, however, the resurrection were shown to be a fraud, then Christianity would collapse as a viable religion. This the apostle Paul recognized very clearly (1 Cor. 15:14-19). Little wonder that sceptics have suggested all kinds of alternative explanations...

3.1. Theories suggesting that Christ may not have died and/or been resurrected

a. Christ merely swooned

This theory holds that Christ fainted on the cross but regained consciousness in the coolness of the grave. In other words, his disciples really thought he was dead when all the while he had just fainted.

Response: Those who crucified him were professional soldiers, who knew what they were doing. The commanding officer made certain Christ was dead before the body was released.

Frankly, it takes a vast amount of faith to believe that someone declared dead after his crucifixion could, upon regaining consciousness in his tomb, remove the long sheets his body had been wrapped in, neatly fold these, and then singlehandedly move the enormous stone covering the grave's entry from the inside with pierced hands and on pierced feet (three healthy individuals had wondered how they might tackle the job from the outside, Mark 16:3). Then he would have had to beat off a platoon of armed soldiers guarding that grave despite having such a big gash in his side that it had caused a pericardial effusion. He would then have had to hike into Jerusalem on those pierced feet to boldly declare to his followers that had risen from the dead!

b. The disciples stole Christ's body

This idea was promoted by the Pharisees after the resurrection:

Mat. 28:12-15, "When they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave a large amount of silver to the soldiers, saying, 'Say that his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. If this comes to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and make you free of worry.' So they took the money and did as they were told. This saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continues until today."

Response: The historical records state that the disciples were hiding in fear of their lives, and that Roman guards were watching the tomb. At

this point in time the disciples were deeply discouraged and fearful men who did not have an inkling that their master would soon rise from the grave. The idea that they would organize a raid against a heavily guarded tomb in order to fabricate a story they did not believe in is too absurd to be taken seriously.

c. The disciples experienced some kind of group hallucination

This idea suggests that the disciples imagined they had seen Jesus and thus came to believe that he had risen from the dead.

Response: The disciples were very slow to believe that Jesus had risen even when they did see him (Luke 24:11, 25; John 20:25). In any case, sceptics would only have needed to go to the tomb to see if Jesus was still there.

d. Jesus' spirit appeared to his disciples

In other words, Jesus did not rise physically, though he did show himself "in spirit" to his disciples.

Response: Jesus assured his disciples that this was not the case by deliberately eating and drinking with them.

Luke 24:37-43, "He said to them, "Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is truly me. Touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they still did not believe for joy, and wondered, he said to them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. He took them, and ate in front of them."

e. The disciples perpetrated a fraud

The disciples fabricated the whole story.

Response: Would they be willing to sacrifice their own lives for something they knew to be a falsehood?

f. The disciples were engaged in wishful thinking

Response: There were many messianic figures before and after Jesus, but none of these movements claimed their leader had died and been resurrected. Those movements themselves either died out, or went forward under a new Messianic leader. Neither happened in the case of the disciples of Jesus.

g. The disciples simply went to the wrong tomb

Response: They did not claim they merely saw an empty tomb, they claimed that they saw the risen Jesus in the flesh.

h. The whole thing is a legend or an etiological myth

The account of the resurrection developed over time to try and explain the story as it had evolved over time.

Response: The resurrection is a central part of the earliest Christian writings (i.e. the gospels and letters), written when eyewitnesses were still alive.

1 Cor. 15:5-8, *“He appeared to Cephas (i.e. the apostle Peter), then to the twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers at once, most of whom remain until now, but some have also fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as to the child born at the wrong time, he appeared to me (i.e. the apostle Paul) also.”*

i. Post-modern approach

Meaning is what you give a text. You simply superimpose your own meaning/interpretation on whatever is written irrespective of the author’s original intent which is impossible to reconstruct anyway.

Response: It is not possible to have a meaningful discussion about any historical event with anyone who refuses to recognize the validity of historical records.

3.2. Evidence that Christ died and rose from the dead

Christ’s resurrection presumes his death, and the two are almost invariably connected in the NT. They cannot be separated; the gospel must include both truths, for the latter completes the former. They are the two great fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Christianity is built on the event of an empty tomb and a missing body, things that were publicly verifiable and empirically falsifiable.

There are some 104 references in the New Testament to Christ’s resurrection.

a. The empty tomb

Christianity began in Jerusalem, the last place it could have done so if Christ’s body had remained in the tomb.

There is not a single scholar of repute who denies the historical fact that the tomb into which the body of Christ was placed was empty by Sunday. It was gone, and no one could produce it.

To dispel the news of Jesus’ resurrection the Jewish authorities would have exhibited his body with great fanfare. Instead, they were forced to

concoct a story which sought to explain an empty tomb and an absent body. All they had were some grave clothes and the neatly rolled up napkin on which his head was laid.

Jn. 20:4-8, "The other disciple outran Peter, and came to the tomb first. Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths lying, yet he did not enter in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and entered into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying, and the cloth that had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself. So then the other disciple who came first to the tomb also entered in, and he saw and believed."

There are only three ways to explain this:

- Either his enemies stole Jesus' body (extremely unlikely, for then they would certainly have produced it to dispel rumours of his resurrection);
- Or his friends stole it (also extremely unlikely, see above);
- Or he really did rise from the dead!

b. The consistently non-contradictory testimony of the various gospels and epistles

Jesus appeared numerous times to various individuals and groups of people. The NT records eleven resurrection appearances (twelve if you include Paul's experience on the road to Damascus), which seem to have occurred in the following order:

On the Sunday:

1. To Mary Magdalene (Mk. 16:9; Jn. 20:11-18).
2. To the other women (Mat. 28:8-10).
3. To the two individuals on the road to Emmaus (Mk. 16:12; Lk. 24:13-35).
4. To Peter (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).
5. To Jesus' disciples with the exception of Thomas (Lk. 24:33-49; Jn. 20:19-24).

A week later:

6. To all of Jesus' disciples (Jn. 20:24-29; 1 Cor. 15:5).

After that:

7. To seven of the disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Jn. 21:1-23).
8. To all of the disciples on a mountain in Galilee (Mat. 28:16-20).
9. To 500 followers in Galilee (1 Cor. 15:6).

10. To James (1 Cor. 15:7).

11. To all the disciples on the day Jesus ascended to heaven (Ac. 1:3-12).

Post-ascension appearance:

12. To Paul on the way to Damascus (Ac. 9:3-8, 17).

c. The Roman seal

Breaking into a sealed tomb guarded by a detail of soldiers was not an escapade those unbelieving, fearful disciples were likely to attempt. The consequences of breaking a Roman seal were fearful, and included the possibility of crucifixion.

d. The testimony of the guards

They knew something supernatural had taken place:

Mat. 28:11, *“Some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.”* And what, exactly, had they seen and experienced?”

Mat. 28:2-4, *“There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.”* (NIV)

The above account also discounts the swoon theory, which holds that Jesus had not really died but that he revived in the cool of the grave.

If Christ had merely swooned, he would have been utterly weakened and near death by the ordeal of crucifixion and encased in burial wrappings. If, in spite of all that, he had managed to free himself, move the heavy stone from the mouth of the grave using pierced hands and with a hole in his side, and stumble out on pierced feet it would have been a small thing for a platoon of Roman soldiers to re-arrest him.

Only a very dramatic event, such as the one described, can account for what actually happened.

e. The testimony of women

The testimony of women in a court of law in 1st century Jewish society was considered worthless. This being the case, the only reason the gospels record that it was women who first discovered the empty tomb, and who then went and told the disciples about it, was because that is what took place. If the story of the resurrection had been concocted later it would not have included the testimony of women, nor painted the church's leaders in such an unfavourable light.

f. The radical change which occurred in the disciples

The resurrection took the disciples completely by surprise, even though Jesus had tried to tell them numerous times in advance that he would rise from the dead. Still, they were not expecting it, and after it happened dismissed the first reports of the event as nonsense.

It was not until the risen Christ had personally confronted them that they became utterly convinced, so much so that, suddenly, this group of fearful men in hiding began to preach the fact of Jesus' resurrection boldly and persistently to the end of their lives. Not a single one parted company with the others on this issue. Each of them was willing to suffer and die for the new reality, a reality which rested on the conviction that they had seen Jesus alive and well after he had been dead and buried.

Compare

Lk. 24:11, *"But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense."*

Jn. 20:25, *"he (the disciple Thomas) said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." (NIV)*

with the fact that practically every sermon in the book of Acts refers to Christ's resurrection:

Ac. 1:21-22; 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:10, 33; 5:30; 7:52, 56; 13:30, 34; 17:18, 31; 22:8; 26:12-15.

As devout Jews the disciples would not dream of creating a new religion for their own benefit, something which would not profit them in any way. Furthermore, deliberately lying and bearing false witness about the very nature of God was outside the conceptual horizon of religious 1st century Jews.

g. The nature of Jesus' resurrection body as described by the witnesses was an altogether new idea

In resurrections familiar to the disciples from the OT narratives and Jesus' own ministry, resurrected people resumed life in their old but re-animated bodies. It is very far-fetched to think of this group of fearful men dreaming up the entirely new idea of a resurrection body which really was corporeal (it could be touched and could consume food) yet was immortal and transcended the laws of nature. There was, in fact, no terminology to describe this science-fictionesque phenomenon. Years later Paul resorted to the term "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15) to describe this new resurrection body.

Note too that the nature of the resurrected Jesus they now preached remained at odds with 1st century Jewish ideas of a Messiah as a theocratic king who would deliver Israel from Gentile oppression, as well as with Greek ideas of the superiority of the soul over the body. The idea of the bodily resurrection was, to them, absurd (see, for instance, Acts 17:32).

The idea mooted by sceptics that the early Christian community experienced some kind of ecstatic vision, dream, hallucination, or mystical experience of “the spirit of Christ” does not square with every one of them insisting to the end of their lives on Christ’s physical, bodily resurrection.

h. The radical change of mind of the apostle Paul

Paul was a highly educated individual steeped in the law of Moses – i.e., not the type of person who would easily change his mind on fundamental religious issues. Yet when he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, this fierce persecutor of Christians – the last person one could imagine embracing the new Christian faith – became so utterly convinced of the reality of the resurrection that he dedicated the remainder of his life to the service of the risen Christ. He would refer frequently to the necessity of the resurrection for the gospel to be true. See especially his great resurrection chapter, 1 Cor. 15, particularly verses 3-8, 13-19, 20.

1 Cor. 15:14, *“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith also is in vain.”*

i. The establishment of the Christian church

While all other religions are founded on the teachings of long-dead men, the claim to the resurrection of its founder as the authentication of his message is unique to the Christian church.

The preaching of the resurrection by the early church was a challenge which that era’s detractors could not refute. It was not a doctrine which developed later in Christian history, but the cause of Christianity in the first place.

Little wonder the early Christians referred to it again and again. In addition to almost every sermon in the book of Acts, most other apostolic literature also does so.

Rom. 4:23-25, "The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." (NIV)

Rom. 6:4, 9-11, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.... For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him." (NIV)

Rom. 8:11, "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you." (NIV)

Rom. 10:9, "If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

1 Cor. 6:14, "God raised up the Lord, and will also raise us up by his power."

2 Cor. 4:14, "He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus."

Gal. 1:1, "Paul, an apostle (not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)."

Eph. 1:18-21, "He [God] raised him [Christ] from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places."

Col. 2:12, "You were also raised with him [Christ] through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."

2 Tim. 2:8, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...."

1 Pet. 1:21, "Through him (i.e. Christ) you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him." (NIV)

j. The immediate change of the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday

Sunday, the day Jesus rose from the dead (Mat. 28:1; Mk. 16:2, 9; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1), introduced the "new covenant" reality.

Jn. 20:19, "On that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were locked where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the middle, and said to them, "Peace be to you."

Ac. 20:7, "On the first day of the week, when the disciples were gathered together to break bread...."

1 Cor. 16:1-2, "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made." (NIV)

Rev. 1:10, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day..."

Both Jesus' birth and his resurrection effected changes in the calendar of the world.

k. The resurrection narratives carry the hallmarks of historical integrity

They were written in the face of hostile opposition. Fabricating such a story would have been dangerous, and thus unlikely.

The main witnesses agree on the fundamental facts, yet provide a variety of details, as would be the case when different people witness an event independent of each other. In other words, they were not repeating a story which they had agreed upon in advance and from which they had ironed out all discrepancies. Only a careful study reveals that certain apparent dissimilarities are, in fact, non-contradictory.

l. Jesus' tomb did not become a place of veneration for the early church

The tombs of the founders of the world religions like, say, that of Muhammed in Medina, became places of veneration. That was not so with the early church. In fact, the exact place where Jesus was interred for the three days in which he experienced death cannot be identified with certainty even today.

m. The 1st century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus appears to affirm Jesus' resurrection

We noted the *Testimonium Flavianum* of Josephus earlier. Much ink has been spilled on the authenticity of this passage. The earliest extant copies of Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* date to the 11th century, i.e., rather late. However, the 4th century church historian Eusebius refers to the *Testimonium Flavium* in Book III of his *Demonstratio evangelica* (Demonstration of the Gospel).

Most reputable scholars today hold that the core of the *Testimonium Flavium* is authentic, though the various reconstructions of that original core seem to reflect each scholars' own presuppositions.

n. Early secular sources offer no alternative explanation to the resurrection

No known historian of the 1st century suggests an alternative explanation. Neither Pliny the Younger (c. 61– 113 A.D.), nor Tacitus (c. 56–120 A.D.), nor Suetonius (c. 69–122 A.D.), all of whom make mention of the existence of Christians, seek to falsify or deny the Christian claim that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Nor does any other manuscript dating back to that era.

1 Cor. 15:13-23

“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised. If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith also is in vain. Yes, we are found false witnesses of God, because we testified about God that he raised up Christ, whom he did not raise up, if it is so that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then they also who are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable. But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since death came by man, the resurrection of the dead also came by man. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then those who are Christ’s, at his coming.”

4. **Who was responsible for Jesus’ death?**

4.1. God

Isa. 53:10, *“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him.”* (NIV)

Rom. 3:23-25, *“For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God sent to be an atoning sacrifice, through faith in his blood, for a demonstration of his righteousness through the passing over of prior sins, in God’s forbearance.”*

Rom. 8:32, *“He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how would he not also with him freely give us all things?”*

2 Cor. 5:21, *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* (NIV)

4.2. The Jewish leaders and the Jerusalem mob

Jn. 11:49-50, 53, *“But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is advantageous for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish... So from that day forward they took counsel that they might put him to death.”*

Lk. 23:21, *“but they [the Jerusalem mob] shouted, saying, “Crucify! Crucify him!”*

See also Mat. 26:3-4; 27:21-25; Jn. 18:28-19:15.

4.3. The Roman authorities

See Mat. 27:27-37; Mk. 15:15-38; Lk. 23:24-42; Jn. 19:16-34.

4.2. Judas

Mat. 26:15, *“Judas said, What are you willing to give me, that I should deliver him to you? They weighed out for him thirty pieces of silver.”*

4.3. Satan

Jn. 13:2, *“During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him...”*

Did Satan not understand what he was doing? Apparently not, for the angelic world did not understand the plan of salvation before it was effected by Christ.

1 Pet. 1:12, *“To them (i.e. the OT prophets) it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to you, they ministered these things, which now have been announced to you through those who preached the Good News to you by the Holy Spirit sent out from heaven; which things angels desire to look into.”*

4.4. Our Sin

1 Cor. 15:3, *“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”*

4.5. Doctrine of concurrence

Ac. 2:23, *“this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” (NIV)*

5. What did Jesus suffer on the Cross?

5.1. Physical pain

Heb. 12:2, *“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

5.2. The pain of bearing (carrying the weight of) the sin of sinful man

1 Pet. 2:24, *“Who his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.”*

2 Cor. 5:21, "For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

5.3. Separation from God the Father

How this kind of separation could take place within the Trinity is a great and awe-full mystery...

Mat. 27:46, "About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lima sabachthani?" That is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

5.4. The wrath of God

During that period of separation the second person of the Trinity appeared (propitiated) the righteous demands of God in the place of sinful man.

Rom. 3:25, "[Jesus] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins." (NIV)

1 Jn. 2:2, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."

6. Why was Jesus' resurrection so important for our salvation?

6.1. Jesus' resurrection is God's guarantee that he is satisfied with every aspect of Jesus' atoning sacrifice

It was God's sign and seal that he accepted the atonement offered by Jesus Christ.

a. Because he perfectly obeyed the law

Phil. 2:9, "And being found in human form, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, yes, the death of the cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name."

b. Because it establishes his deity

Rom. 1:3-4, "Concerning his Son, who was born of the offspring of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."

- c. Because it is one of the bases upon which our salvation from the power of sin over us is established

Rom. 5:10, "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life."

- d. Because it allowed him to inherit David's throne forever

2 Sam. 7:12-16, "When your days are fulfilled, and you sleep with your fathers, I will set up your offspring after you, who will proceed out of your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men; but my loving kindness will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you. Your house and your kingdom will be made sure forever before you. Your throne will be established forever."

Lk. 1:32, "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David."

- e. So he could serve as our great high priest forever

As High Priest he intercedes on behalf of sinners.

Rom. 8:34, "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."

Heb. 7:16, "(Jesus Christ) has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life." (NIV)

Heb. 7:26, "For such a high priest was fitting for us: holy, guiltless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens."

Heb. 8:1, "We have such a high priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens."

1 Jn. 1:1-2, "I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

- f. In order to win the victory over death itself.

He "tasted death" so that we might live forever. In his resurrection Christ "bruised the serpent's head" (Gen. 3:15)

Rom. 5:11-21 is a passage explaining how Jesus obtained the victory.

Heb. 2:9, "But we see him who has been made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for everyone."

Rom. 4:25, "[Jesus] who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification."

Rev. 1:18, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." (NIV)

g. So he could give gifts to his body, the church

Eph. 4:10-13, "He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, shepherds^{and} and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, to the work of serving, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Rom. 12:5-6, "We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, if prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith."

h. So God could appoint him the judge of all mankind

Ac. 10:41-42, "He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead." (NIV)

Ac. 17:31, "He [God] has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained; of which he has given assurance to all men, in that he has raised him from the dead."

i. So we would no longer be in the bondage of sin

1 Cor. 15:16-20, "For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then they also who are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable. But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruits of those who are asleep."

On Christ's being raised from the dead see also Ac. 3:13-15; Eph. 1:19-20; Rom. 6:1-4; 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:3-4.

6.2. Jesus' resurrection was in fulfilment of OT prophecy

Isa. 53:10-12, *"Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."* (NIV)

1 Cor. 15:3-8, *"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born."* (NIV)

a. Typologically/illustratively

i. The sacrifice of Isaac is an affirmation of faith in the resurrection from the dead (Gen. 22)

Heb. 11:17, *"By faith, Abraham, being tested, offered up Isaac. Yes, he who had gladly received the promises was offering up his one and only son; even he to whom it was said, "your offspring will be accounted as from Isaac"; concluding that God is able to raise up even from the dead. Figuratively speaking, he also did receive him back from the dead."*

ii. Jonah in the fish (Jon. 1:17, 2)

Mat. 12:39-40, *"But he [Jesus] answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign will be given it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

b. Prophetically

Particularly with respect to David's throne enduring forever.

Psa. 16:9-10, "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay." (NIV)

Psa. 86: 27-29, 36-37, "And I will appoint him (i.e. a descendent of David) to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure... his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky." (NIV)

6.3. Jesus' resurrection confirmed the truthfulness of everything he ever said

No statement can be more outrageous than repeatedly and insistently foretelling your own immediate physical resurrection from death.

Mat. 12:39-40, See above.

Mat. 16:21, "From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up."

Mat. 17:22-23, "While they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up."

Mat. 27:62-64, "Now on the next day, which was the day after the Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will rise again.' Command therefore that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest perhaps his disciples come at night and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He is risen from the dead;'" and the last deception will be worse than the first."

Mk. 8:31-32, "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke to them openly."

Jn. 2:18-22, "The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from

the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.” (NIV)

Jn. 10:17-18, “Therefore the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down by myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father.”

6.4. Jesus’ resurrection guarantees the promise that Christians will also be resurrected

It answers the age-old question, “If a man die, will he live again?” (Job 14:14). The OT’s answer was YES!

Dan. 12:2, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Isa. 26:19, “Your dead shall live. My dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth will cast out the departed spirits.”

Hos. 13:14, “I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?” (NIV)

The guarantee of the OT promise is Jesus, “the resurrection and the life”, who had the power to raise himself from the dead (Jn. 10:17-18, see above.)

Hence he could also raise others to eternal life: e.g. the daughter of the synagogue leader (Mat. 9:18-26, the son of the widow of Nain (Lk. 7:11-18), Lazarus (Jn. 11:1-44).

According to 1 Cor. 15:12-58. Jesus is “the first fruits” from the dead. [v20]. He was the first one to be resurrected for eternity, and we will follow after him. Redemption will only be finally complete when our bodies are transformed into perfect and incorruptible bodies when Christ returns.

Phil. 3:20-21, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself.”

1 Thes. 4:13-17, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an

archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” (NIV)

Rev. 1:17-19, “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.” (NIV)

6.5. Jesus’ resurrection must be central in the preaching the gospel

Notice how central the death and resurrection of Jesus are in the preaching of the early church: Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 7:2-56; 10:34-43; 13:16-41.

1 Cor. 15 also emphasises that without a resurrection in space and time Christianity is nothing.

Without Christ’s resurrection, the preacher has nothing to preach and the believer nothing to believe.

7. Did Jesus descend to hell between his death and resurrection?

The Apostles’ Creed states that “he [i.e. Jesus] descended into hell”. This statement is based on the following verses:

Psa. 16:10, “For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, neither will you allow your holy one to see corruption.”

Is. 53:9, “They made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death; although he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.”

Eph. 4:8-10, “When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.” Now this, “He ascended”, what is it but that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.” This verse is a partial quote from Psalm 68:18

Col. 2:14-15, “He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, wiping out the handwriting in ordinances which was against us; and he has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross; having stripped the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

Mat. 12:40, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

1 Pet. 3:18-20, *“Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which he also went and preached to the spirits in prison, who before were disobedient, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, while the ship was being built. In it, few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. This is a symbol of baptism, which now saves you – not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him.”*

Those who reject the idea of Jesus descending into hell hold that Psalm 68 refers to Jesus’ descent to the earth, that the word *sheol* used in Psalm 16 is a generic term for the grave, and that Jesus’ reference to going to the “heart of the earth” simply refers to death and the grave. They also argue that the 1 Peter passage is, as Peter himself states, a symbol meant to encourage the hard-pressed people of Peter’s time to continue their Christian witness, just as Christ’s Spirit warned the people of Noah’s day (whose spirits are now “in prison”) of the judgment to come.

They also point out that while on the cross Christ cried out *“It is finished”* (John 19:30). In other words, there was nothing left for him to do to effect salvation. Furthermore, he said to God the Father just prior to his death, *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”* (Luke 23:46). Lastly, he promised the thief on the cross, *“Assuredly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:42).

8. What is the nature of Christ’s resurrection body?

This is an important question because the resurrected Christ is described as the *“first fruits from among the dead”* (1 Cor. 15:20, 23), suggesting that we can expect to receive a body like his resurrection body.

Phil. 3:20-21, *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory.”*

1 Cor. 15:20-23, *“But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since death came by man, the resurrection of the dead also came by man. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then those who are Christ’s, at his coming.”*

The information the Bible gives about this new, resurrected body seems from our current definition of things somewhat of a mystery, in that it is described as both

real, actual, physical flesh and blood (Jn. 20:19-25; 1 Jn. 1:1-3) yet also as spiritual, sometimes in the same chapter! (Lk. 24:39; 1 Cor. 15:50 versus 1 Cor. 15:42-54).

There is no single word that describes this new, seemingly conflicted reality. This apparent conflict in our current perception arises from the fact that the "heavenly body" (1 Cor. 15:35-44) will no longer seek to veil the heavenly realities it contains (Mat. 17:1-9, Rev. 1:10-16).

It is immortal (Heb. 7:16), and not subject any longer to hunger, thirst, tiredness, etc. It is incorruptible because of its sinlessness (Ac. 2:31-32; 13:34-37; Psa. 16:8-11). It can pass through physical objects and appear and disappear at will (John 20:19; Lk. 24:31, 51; Ac. 1:9).

Christ will return bodily, visibly and personally, just as he ascended to heaven.

Ac. 1:10-11, "While they were looking steadfastly into the sky as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing, who also said, "You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky."

Phil. 3:20-21, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself."

Rev. 1:7, "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, including those who pierced him."

XIII

Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA)

*“He was pierced for our transgressions.
He was crushed for our iniquities.
The punishment that brought our peace was on him;
and by his wounds we are healed.”*

(Isaiah 53:5)



IN THIS CHAPTER we move from thinking about Christ’s work from a historical perspective to thinking about it doctrinally. In other words, we consider the question, “What does it all mean? What is the importance of Christ’s life, death and resurrection?”

This question is addressed by the doctrine of the atonement.

1 Cor. 15:3 *“Christ died (history) for our sins”* (doctrine).

Gal. 6:14, *“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (personal response).

The doctrine of the atonement is the heart and core of the Christian faith. The Christian must have thorough understanding of it. It has frequently come under attack, even by people who self-identify as Christians.

There was only one possible way for God to justify sinners – even for God – and that was through penal substitutionary atonement (PSA).

God did not need to save anyone. He did not spare the angels when they rebelled but cast them into hell (2 Pet. 2:4). Just as with them, God is also in a state of righteous, eternal wrath regarding sinful mankind. But when He mercifully decided to save some, it had to be done by substitutionary atonement.

Mat. 26:39, *“If it is possible, let this cup pass way from me”* (but it was not possible).

Lk. 24:25-26, Jesus speaking to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: *“Did not the Christ have to suffer these things...?”*

Remember, God is limited by his own holy character and covenant promises. The “unboundedness” of God is not scriptural. He is faithful and true to his character and word.

The atonement was an irrevocable consequence of God's desire to re-new fellowship with us. But to do so, he had to save us from who he is as the righteous, just and holy God with whom we, in our natural state, are in a state of enmity.

So do not simply tell someone “God's loves you”. Tell them also that in their natural state they are in a state of enmity with the thrice holy God. The atonement was not some kind of ransom paid by a loving God to a nasty Satan. No, it is God's answer to who he himself is.³⁴

The only escape from the wrath of an angry God is by fleeing forward, through that narrow door which is Christ, the incarnated second person of the Triune God who *“was obligated in all things to be made like his brothers, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people”* (Heb. 2:17).

1. What is Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA)?

Penal substitutionary atonement (PSA) is that set of events which the Triune God planned in eternity which would allow him to be gracious and merciful towards sinful people who would justly fall under his eternal judgment—without compromising his perfect righteousness.

The only way this could take place was if a being of equal worth and purity as God himself took on full humanity, and for that matchless God-man to vicariously absorb God's righteous judgment on behalf of those sinners.

The only way this could be accomplished was if one of the Persons of the Trinity took on that role—and this is what happened. The Second Person of the Trinity would become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, meet the demands of the law on behalf of mankind, and then lay down his life as a perfect atoning sacrifice on their behalf.

Penal substitutionary atonement is, ultimately, an exchange which took place between the persons of the Godhead. All of salvation history prior to the Christ event leads up to it, and all of salvation history since then flows from this event.

The fundamental question of religion is often thought of as “how can sinful man be reconciled with a holy God”. The actual fundamental question is, “How can the utterly righteous God reconcile with sinful man”. That is the question which the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement (PSA) addresses.

³⁴ For alternate theories of the atonement see section 15.

2. Why is PSA necessary?

The inescapable need for penal substitutionary atonement is because of the righteous wrath of God.

Mankind faces the ultimate calamity: the wrath of God. The problem for mankind is that God is absolutely just and righteous. This means that he demands perfect obedience. The standard he demands is reflected in his law, which reflects his character. Every person innately grasps the essence of this law, yet the failure to obey it incurs an eternal penalty, namely the abiding wrath of God. J.I. Packer calls God's wrath: "Holiness rejecting sin"³⁵.

2.1. The OT on the wrath of God

In Islam Allah is not hurt by sin. Forgiveness doesn't cost him anything — hence it is not difficult for him to forgive.

The OT, however, teaches that God MUST condemn sinners:

Ex. 23:7, *"I will not justify the wicked."*

Psa. 7:11, *"God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day."* (NIV)

Num. 16:46, *"Moses said to Aaron, 'Take your censer, and put fire from off the altar in it, and lay incense on it, and carry it quickly to the congregation, and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from Yahweh!'"*

Deut. 9:8, *"You provoked Yahweh to wrath, and Yahweh was angry with you to destroy you."*

2 Sam. 6:7, *"Yahweh's anger burned against Uzzah; and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by God's ark."*

2 Chron. 36:16, *"They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until Yahweh's wrath arose against his people, until there was no remedy."*

See also 2 Kings 17:17-23; Jeremiah 32:29; Lamentations 2:2-3.

2.2. The NT on the wrath of God

Jn. 3:36, *"The one who disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."*

Rom. 1:18-20; 28-32 *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known of God is revealed in them, for God revealed it to them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even*

³⁵ Storms, S. 2015. *Packer on the Christian Life*, Wheaton. Crossway, p. 32.

his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse.... Even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil habits, secret slanderers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death..."

Rom. 2:14-15, *"for when Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying with them, and their thoughts among themselves accusing or else excusing them."*

Rom. 6:23, *"For the wages of sin is death."*

Gal. 3:10, *"For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them."*

Col. 3:5-6, *"Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth: sexual immorality, uncleanness, depraved passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things' sake the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience."*

Eph. 5:6, *"The wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience."*

1 Thes. 1:10, *"Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come."*

Rev. 14:19-20, *"The angel thrust his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God. The wine press was trodden outside of the city, and blood came out of the wine press, even to the bridles of the horses, as far as one thousand six hundred stadia."*

Rev. 19:15, *"Out of his [Christ's] mouth proceeds a sharp, double-edged sword, that with it he should strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He treads the wine press of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty."*

Man is incapable of living a perfectly righteous life. Therefore he cannot be accepted by a holy, just and righteous God.

3. What is meant by the word “atonement”?

The following verses use the word “atonement” to describe the work which Jesus accomplished while on earth:

Rom. 3:25, “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.” (NIV)

Heb. 2:17, “For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.” (NIV)

The Hebrew words referring to the concept of atonement mean “to cover”, “appease”, and “atone for”. In Christian theology the word refers to “the work Christ did in his life and death to earn our salvation” (Grudem, 568).

Note how that definition includes the life as well as the death of Jesus. As such the word atonement is very broad, describing all that Christ did to reconcile God and man. It means “at-one-ment”, or the bringing together of God and man.

Christ’s atoning work is the grounds for the forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, spiritual regeneration, adoption by God as his children, and the final salvation at Christ’s second coming.

But how was the atonement accomplished?

4. How was atonement accomplished in the OT?

In the book of Exodus God entered into a covenant relationship with the people of Israel:

- He rescued (redeemed) his people from Egypt;
- He established a covenant and rule of law for them to live by;
- He gave the tabernacle as a sign that he lived among his redeemed people.

But Exodus leaves us with a problem in chapter 40:34f: “Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. **Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle**” (NBIV). God is among his people—but he is holy and they are sinful. What could the sinful people do to restore the relationship with their holy God whenever they had sinned and broken covenant with him?

The answer appeared in the book of Leviticus: sinful people could approach God through a substitutionary atonement effected through the sacrificial system.

4.1. The daily sacrifice

Regular sacrifice brought about the expiation of sin (i.e., the cancellation, covering or putting away of sin). On the basis of the sacrificial system God accepted the individual sinner, as well as the community as a whole, so that he could live among them.

Lev. 1:2-4, *“When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock. “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.”* (NIV) See also Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:6, 16, 18; 6:7; 7:7; 12:7-8, etc.

You could approach God *if* you brought a sacrifice. Literally, “the offering brings you near”. The sacrifice acted as your substitute – that is why you always put your hand on the head of the animal before it was killed.

Atonement is a nasty business. Sacrificing animals was a gory mess. The tabernacle was set up in such a way that one first came to the altar of sacrifice before one could proceed further.

4.2. Moses sought atonement for Israel by offering himself as a sacrifice

When Israel sinned by making a golden calf, an idol, Moses sought to atone for its idolatry by offering up himself.

Ex. 32:30-32, *“ On the next day, Moses said to the people, ‘You have sinned a great sin. Now I will go up to Yahweh. Perhaps I shall make atonement for your sin.’ Moses returned to Yahweh, and said, ‘Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made themselves gods of gold. Yet now, if you will, forgive their sin – and if not, please blot me out of your book which you have written.’”*

4.3. The Day of Atonement (yom kippur)

The various rules about offerings and festivals lead us to Lev. 16, which describes the Day of Atonement. This was an annual festival in which a comprehensive propitiation (see 12.3) was offered for all the sins the people had committed in the course of the previous year.

This was the most solemn day of the yearly calendar. The high priest would enter the Holy of Holies, stand before the Shekinah glory of the Lord, and present the blood of sacrifice on the mercy seat of the ark which covered the law. In this act *“mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other”* (Psa. 85:10).

Lev. 17:11, *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life."*

In the New Testament, the epistle to the Hebrews declares that in his death Jesus Christ has achieved permanently what the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement and all the other blood sacrifices could only illustrate. See especially Heb. 9:11-14.

5. What did the OT sacrificial system actually accomplish in terms of providing atonement for sin?

Sins (both those of the nation and of the believing individual) are described as having been covered, blotted out, purged, removed (i.e. set aside), "cast behind God's back" or "into the depth of the sea" and thus "hidden" from God's wrath.

Psa. 32:1-2, *"Blessed is he whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is covered."*

Isa. 38:17, *"You (God) have cast all my sins behind your back."*

Isa. 43:25, *"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; and I will not remember your sins."*

Isa. 44:22, *"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins."*

Note that their sins were covered and forgiven, not cleansed! Only the blood of Christ could do that. It did so retroactively, paying off the enormous debt which had accrued over the centuries (a bit like paying off an enormous credit card debt).

Isa. 53:4-6, *"Surely he has borne our sickness, and carried our suffering; yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way; and Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all."*

Heb. 9:22, *"According to the law, nearly everything is cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission."*

Heb. 10:1-4, 11, *"For the law, having a shadow of the good to come, not the very image of the things, can never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. Or else wouldn't they have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having been once cleansed, would have had no more consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a yearly reminder of sins. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins... Every*

priest indeed stands day by day serving and often offering the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins."

The concept of substitution is frequently illustrated in the Old Testament through the elaborate sacrificial system, the Passover (Ex. 12), the annual provision of a scapegoat to atone for the sins of the people (Lev. 16), and the promise of a suffering servant who would provide atonement for sins by means of offering his life as a sacrificial lamb (Isa. 52:4-7)

6. How was atonement accomplished in the NT?

Through penal substitutionary atonement (PSA). PSA is theological shorthand for the Bible's teaching on how an altogether just and righteous God can be reconciled with sinful man who, by nature, is under his judgement.

7. What does the word "penal" in PSA stand for?

The word penal in PSA refers to the fact that from the divine perspective Christ accomplished a legally acceptable punishment on behalf of sinners. He satisfied God's justice, thus enabling him to act in mercy without taking anything away from any of his attributes. Thus God himself met the law's demands on our behalf through Jesus Christ.

Rom. 3:23-26, we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God sent to be an atoning sacrifice... to demonstrate his righteousness at this present time; that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus."

8. What does the word "substitutionary" in PSA refer to?

The word substitutionary refers to the fact that Christ took our place as the object of God's wrath.

Although the actual word substitution is not used in the NT, it uses such phrases as "for us", "for me", "for the ungodly", etc., in numerous verses with respect to Christ's death. Christ's death was substitutionary (or vicarious) in that he died in the place of sinners.

Rom. 5:8, "God commended his love for us in that while we were still sinner Christ died for us."

1 Cor. 5:7, "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed in our place."

2 Cor. 5:19, 21, *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation... For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

Gal. 2:20, *"I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."*

Gal. 3:13, *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."*

Eph. 5:2, 25, *"Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God... Christ also loved the assembly, and gave himself up for it."*

1 Pet. 2:24, Christ, *"who his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed."*

1 Pet. 3:18, *"Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust."* (NIV)

1 Tim. 2:6, *"Christ gave himself a ransom for all."* (NIV)

Heb. 9:14, *"How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without defect to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"* Note the 3 persons of the Trinity each playing their role in the plan of salvation.

Heb. 9:22, *"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin."*

Heb. 10:10, *"we have been sanctified through the offering (sacrifice) of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."*

See also; Rom. 5:6-9; 1 Cor. 15:3; Isa. 53:5-6; 1 Cor. 5:7; 3:21; Mark 10:38, 45; 14:33-36; John 3:14-18; 10:11; Heb. 10:1-4; Mat. 26:28.

9. What made Jesus Christ a legally acceptable substitute for sinful mankind?

How can God (as it says in Romans 3:26) be both just and the one who justifies sinners? Through Christ, who at Calvary, bore the wrath of God. There the character of the holy and just God, whose eternal, unchangeable demand that sin be punished in full, is fully revealed. It was at Calvary where God, the Lord and Creator of the universe, poured the full measure of his vengeance and wrath and the full intensity of his hatred for sin, not on us, but on his beloved Son.

Mat. 27:46, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

The sun hid its face while Jesus Christ was subjected to the wrath of God on behalf of sinners. Not until God's anger had abated, not until sin had been fully

propitiated, did He commit his spirit to his father and die with the victorious cry, "It is finished!".

As Isaiah had predicted, "He poured out his soul to death and bore the sin of many. God saw the travail of his soul and was satisfied (Isa. 53:11-12). His suffering was not for eternity, but it was complete. It did not have to go on indefinitely because, as God, the value of his person was limitless.

The Roman Catholic mass seeks to re-present Christ's sacrifice on the cross. However, Christ was offered once and for all to bear the sins of many (Heb. 9:25-29). There is no more condemnation, ever, for those who are in Christ Jesus, for those whose identity is in him (Rom. 8:1).

Isa. 53:6, "Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Isa. 53:12, "He bore the sins of many."

2 Cor. 5:21, "Him who knew no sin he (i.e. God) made to be sin on our behalf."

Gal. 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us."

Heb. 9:28, "He was offered once to bear the sins of many" (NIV).

1 Pet. 2:24, "Who (Christ) his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree."

9.1. The fact that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person

The fact that the second person of the Trinity became fully man in Jesus Christ without ceding any of his divinity enabled him to fulfil the law for people, and then to bear a legally acceptable punishment.

As fully human Jesus Christ could take the place of a sinful mankind, and as fully God he is of infinite personal worth and could thus atone for all sinners.

9.2. The fact that Jesus Christ fulfilled the law on behalf of sinners

If Christ had merely earned forgiveness of sin for us, we would still not merit heaven. We would be considered morally neutral, clean slates at best. Christ had to live a perfect life of obedience on our behalf as well, doing what Adam and Eve failed to do.

In other words, he did not merely die on our behalf, he also obeyed the law on our behalf in the course of his life; in life he fulfilled all righteousness (Mat. 3:15). And because that righteousness, just like his death, is imputed to us, it is counted in our favour!

Rom. 5:19, "For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous."

Christ had no need to demonstrate his own righteousness for he'd lived in perfect fellowship with the Father from eternity. But by living righteously on this earth as a man for our sake, we inherit a record of obedience which merits God's favour, which merits eternal life with him!

For us he lived a life of obedience. For us he suffered his whole life! For us he was tempted, opposed and suffered grief, tremendous physical pain and loss. For us he became a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3).

This is what that mysterious verse of Hebrews 12:3-4 refers to: *"Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what He suffered."*

Christ perfectly fulfilled all the demands of the law on behalf of sinners.

Mat. 5:17, "Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

Rom. 8:1-4, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh; that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

2 Cor. 5:21, "For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Heb. 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin."

Without Christ's imputed righteousness we would be back with Adam and Eve in the garden, back on probation. But with Christ's active righteousness imputed to us we are "made righteous", counted as though fully righteous, forever. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

9.3. The fact that Jesus Christ bore a legally acceptable punishment on behalf of sinners.

The concept of penal substitutionary (or vicarious) atonement is the heart of the Bible's teaching on how sinful people can be reconciled with a holy God.

Penal substitutionary atonement (PSA) means that Christ sacrificed himself on behalf of others, and in doing so bore a legally acceptable punishment on their behalf. This is what the OT sacrificial system looked forward to. PSA means that Christ's work is legally acceptable before God. It satisfied his justice.

Christ's death was penal (or judicial) in that he satisfied God's justice by fulfilling the demands of the law by perfectly keeping it during the course of his life, and by satisfying the demand of death for lawbreakers on behalf of sinners. In other words, he lived the life sinners should have lived, and took upon himself the punishment (penalty) demanded by the law, in their place.

Rom. 3:23-26, "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God sent to be an atoning sacrifice, through faith in his blood, for a demonstration of his righteousness through the passing over of prior sins, in God's forbearance; to demonstrate his righteousness at this present time; that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus."

NT writers sometimes use the image of "the tree" or "the cross of Christ" to mean Jesus' atoning death.

Gal. 6:14, "But far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

1 Pet. 2:24, Christ "who his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed."

Paul refers to "the message of the cross" (1 Cor. 1:18) and "the offence (or scandal) of the cross" (Gal. 5:11). The connection with the doctrine of atonement is made especially clear in the phrase "the blood of his cross".

Col. 1:20, "For all the fullness [of God] was pleased to dwell in him [Christ]; and through him [Christ] to reconcile all things to himself [God], by him, whether things on the earth, or things in the heavens, having made peace through the blood of his cross. You, being in past times alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil deeds, yet now he [Christ] has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without defect and blameless before him [God]."

10. Where do we find the clearest teaching on PSA in the NT?

All the NT writers refers to it, but the apostle Paul is the greatest teacher on the subject of PSA.

Paul maintains that God justifies sinners on a just basis, namely, that Jesus Christ, acting on their behalf, satisfied the claims of God's law upon them.

Note carefully every sentence and Bible reference in the following paragraph by J. I. Packer in the *New Bible Dictionary*:

PENAL SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT (PSA)

He (i.e. Jesus Christ) was ‘born under the law’ (Gal. 4:4) in order to fulfil the precepts and bear the penalty of the law in their stead.

By his ‘blood’ (i.e. his death) he put away their sins (Rom. 3:25; 5:9).

By his obedience to God he won for all his people the status of law-keepers (Rom. 5:19).

He became ‘obedient unto death’ (Phil. 2:8); his life of righteousness culminated in his dying the death of the unrighteous, bearing the law’s penal curse (Gal. 3:13; *cf.* Is. 53:4-12). In his person on the cross, the sins of his people were judged and expiated.

Through this ‘one act of righteousness’ – his sinless life and death – ‘the free gift came unto all men to justification of life’ (Rom. 5:18, RV).

Thus believers become ‘the righteousness of God’ in and through him who ‘knew no sin’ personally, but was representatively ‘made sin’ (treated as a sinner, and judged) in their place (2 Cor. 5:21). Thus Paul speaks of ‘Christ Jesus, whom God made... our righteousness’ (1 Cor. 1:30).

The single most important book on the subject of PSA is Romans. Let us follow Paul’s line of argument step by step. First, however, some background.

In 40 A.D. the emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome. This meant that the Jewish component of the Roman church, established after Pentecost, was suddenly gone; only the Gentile component remained. In 54 A.D., however, Claudius died, the edict lapsed, and Jews could return to Rome. Many did. Christian Jews re-joined the church, again bringing with them their legalistic heritage. This created tension in the Christian community. So, in 57 A.D. Paul writes to explain the fundamentals of the Christian faith to this mixed church, and its application to both Jews and Gentiles. He does so very systematically.

10.1. The problem is spelled out in Rom. 1:1-3:20

1:1-7	Paul introduces “the Gospel” as a message about “Jesus Christ our Lord”, who has both a human and a divine nature, and who rose from the dead. 1-4.
1:16-17	He presents the possibility that both Jews and non-Jews can receive righteousness, that is, be justified. 16-17.
1:18-19	He declares that God’s wrath is against all sin.
1:20 – 3:20	He proves that all are sinners, both Jews and non-Jews. He proves that religion makes no difference to our guilt: none can make themselves righteous.

The problem Paul spells out is the one that perplexed Job in Job 9:2: “*How can a mortal be righteous before God?*” How can we get rid of our guilt? How can we be set free from the controlling power of sin?

10.2. The answer is spelled out in Rom. 3:21-5:11

3:21	A righteousness is given, apart from religious law-keeping.
3:22	This righteousness is brought to us by Jesus Christ and is received by faith.
3:23-24	The source of justification is God’s grace, and has been made possible by Christ’s work of redemption.
3:25	By his death (“blood”), Christ turned away God’s wrath from us.
3:25-31	So God is just. He has punished sin and is still able to declare sinners righteous. We receive righteousness by faith in Jesus.
4:1-22	An OT example of a believer justified by faith, not by law-keeping. It is God who justifies the wicked.
4:23-25	The death and resurrection of Jesus achieve our justification: substitutionary atonement!
5:1-11	Besides justification, the results of “Christ died for us” are salvation from God’s wrath, and being reconciled with him.
The rest of the book	All the benefits which flow from PSA are valid for both Jews and Gentiles.

11. Could God have saved mankind any other way?

No. There was only one possible way for God to justify sinners – even for God – and that was through penal substitutionary atonement.

Do you ever wonder why he didn’t save any of the fallen angelic world? Because God, as it were, faced a horrific dilemma. God did not need to save anyone. He did not spare the angels when they rebelled but cast them into hell (2 Pet. 2:4). Just as with them, God was also in a state of righteous, eternal wrath vis-a-vis mankind. But when he mercifully decided to save some, it had to be done by PSA in order not to take away from his utter righteousness. God cannot be other than what he is, perfect in all his attributes. And he opted to save people at the expense of the fallen angelic world. How do you think they feel about this?

Mat. 26:39, “If it is possible, *let this cup pass way from me...*” (but it was not possible.”

Lk. 24:25-26, Jesus speaking to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: *“Did not the Christ have to suffer these things...?”*

Remember, God is limited by his own holy character and covenant promises. The “unboundedness” of God is not scriptural.

This is one of the great differences between the God of Islam and of Christianity. Salvation in Islam does not cost Allah anything. In fact, the concept of justification by God doesn't exist in Islam

12. What other concepts are associated with the doctrine of the atonement?

No single word can cover all the aspects and combination of truths which flow from God's provision of PSA in Christ.

Although the atonement is a multi-faceted truth, at its heart is PSA. It is the source of every other blessing which the atonement of Christ provided (some of which are sometimes wrongly taken to be the main reason for Christ's work on the cross).

12.1. The Glory of the Cross

The idea of being crucified was so horrific a thought to a Roman citizen that the Roman orator Cicero (d. 43 B.C.) stated, “Not only let the cross be absent from the person of Roman citizens, but its very name from their thoughts, eyes and ears” (*Born Crucified*, p. 31). There was nothing glorious associated with the idea of the cross. This makes Paul's statement that he “gloried in the cross” so shocking. *“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Gal. 6:14).

The cross (hanging from a tree) was a symbol of being accursed of God.

Deut. 21:22-23, *“If a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree; his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him the same day; for he who is hanged is accursed of God; that you do not defile your land which Yahweh your God gives you for an inheritance.”*

Little wonder that it was in the cross that the world (Satan's domain) vented its hatred for Christ: “Crucify him!

12.2. Expiation

Expiation means the cancellation, covering or putting away sin. Neo-orthodox and certain liberals like this term for reasons we shall see later.

12.3. Propitiation

Propitiation means suffering in order to turn away wrath, to appease, to render favourable.

The pagan idea of propitiation was that you could appease someone's anger by offering a sufficiently valuable gift or sacrifice. Among the ancients it was used to describe an act which appeased the gods or made them propitious (favourably inclined) towards people, for the gods were not conceived as being naturally favourable towards mankind.

We see this illustrated when the Baal prophets tried to "appease the gods" by sacrifice and self-mutilation (1 Kin. 18:21-29), or when Jacob tried to appease (propitiate) his brother Esau by sending him large numbers of animals as a present (Gen. 32:20). It's a bit like the little girl who seeks to appease her father's anger by offering him her teddy bear: "Here, daddy, I'll let you play with Teddy!"

In the Bible propitiation is never conceived as an act of man in which he seeks to gain a favourable attitude from God. The Biblical concept is that man has nothing to offer God which can appease, propitiate his wrath.

Only God himself, through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ can appease himself. Now that he has appeased himself, he can be merciful and gracious towards sinners.

Rom. 3:24-25, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." (NIV)

Heb. 2:17, "Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." (NIV)

1 Jn. 2:2, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." (NIV)

1 Jn. 4:10, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (NIV)

12.4. Justification

The words justification, justice, righteous and righteousness all translate related Greek words based on the root *dikaios*, which means "to acquit, to make or to declare righteous".

Rom. 4:25, Jesus Christ "who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification."

Rom. 5:16, 18, "Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification... Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people." (NIV)

12.5. Reconciliation

Justification is a legal term, while reconciliation is relational, personal. It means "making enemies friends again". It means bringing those who disagree with each other back into agreement. The word is used in non-salvific sense in the Bible to describe the need of two brothers, or of a husband and wife that have been estranged, to be reconciled to each other (Mat. 5:24; 1 Cor. 7:11).

In soteriological (salvation from sin) terms the concept is similar to "peace with God". Because of their sin, people are separated from God. Jesus reconciles (restores peace) between God and man.

Rom. 5:10-11, "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

2 Cor. 5:17-19, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation."

According to Martin Luther's Theology of the Cross, mankind is incapable of fulfilling God's law. Hence the "theologian of the cross" preaches what seems foolish to the world (1 Cor. 1:18), notably that humans cannot earn righteousness, nor add to the righteousness of the cross. Whatever righteousness is granted to humanity comes from outside of itself.

The "theologian of glory", on the other hand, teaches that humans have the ability to do the good that lies within them because some ability to do good remains in them after the fall. Hence they are saved by participating in or cooperating with the righteousness given by God. According to Luther these two theologies have radically different starting points with respect to understanding how people know about God and the world. For the theologian of glory, reason and personal perceptions should be employed to increase knowledge about God and the world. For the theologian of the cross, it is only through the self-revelation of God that people can learn about God and their relation to God—and the most perfect self-revelation of God is God's Word become flesh, Jesus the Christ.

Eph. 2:13-16, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off are made near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in the flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, having killed the hostility thereby."

Col. 1:19-22, "For all the fullness was pleased to dwell in him; and through him to reconcile all things to himself, by him, whether things on the earth, or things in the heavens, having made peace through the blood of his cross. You, being in past times alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil deeds, yet now he has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without defect and blameless before him."

12.6. Redemption

Redemption means "to set free for a price, to pay a ransom". It is the act of paying the necessary price to set someone free from slavery, captivity or the death penalty.

Redemption is the act of purchasing a slave and setting him/her free, while the ransom is the price paid for that redemptive act. People are in bondage to sin and Satan, and Jesus redeemed his people (paid the price for their freedom).

Both Hebrew and Greek have a number of words to communicate this concept. The various Hebrew words mean: "to ransom, purchase, avenge, rescue, to break off, to tear apart". The various Greek words mean: "to ransom, deliver, purchase from the marketplace or from the forum".

OT illustrations:

- Israel's redemption during the Exodus by the blood of the Passover lamb. The blood separated Israel from the rest of the world (i.e. Egypt) (Ex. 8:22-23; 12).
- Redemption money used to redeem Israel (Ex. 30:11-16; Num. 3:44-51; 1 Pet. 1:18-20).
- The idea of the kinsman redeemer whose responsibility it was to redeem a wife, slave or lands which were forfeited. This person had to be a willing relative (you could not force someone to do it) who was able to pay the full price (Ruth).

So, to redeem us from the bondage of sin, Christ had to pay a ransom, the price paid to release us from bondage.

Mat. 20:28, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

1 Tim. 2:5-6, *“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all; the testimony in its own times.”*

Ac. 20:28, *“Shepherd the assembly of the Lord and God, which he purchased with his own blood.”*

Note that this price, this ransom, was not paid to Satan, but paid to God. It is God appeasing his own just demands.

13. What are Christians redeemed from?

From all the consequences of the wrath of God!

13.1. “All iniquity/lawlessness”

Tit. 2:13-14, *“Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness.”* (NIV)

13.2. The curse of the law

Gal. 3:13; 4:5, *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.... that he might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of children.”*

13.3. The kingdom of darkness; Satan

Col. 1:13-14, *“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* (NIV)

Note: this is something in the present. The wrath of God is hell, thus redemption from hell is redemption from the wrath of God, which was obtained through Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

13.4. Eternal Death

Job. 19:25-27, *“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives. In the end, he will stand upon the earth. After my skin is destroyed, then in my flesh shall I see God, Whom I, even I, shall see on my side. My eyes shall see, and not as a stranger.”*

Psa. 49:15, *“God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.”*

Cor. 15:53-55, *“For this perishable body must become imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ But when this perishable body will have become imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then what is written will happen: “Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?”*

14. Does Christ's redemption also deliver us from sickness?

14.1. Argument for

Some Christians believe that besides sin, the death of Christ also dealt with physical diseases and sicknesses. There is, therefore, the potential for healing of all illnesses for believers. Physical healing is considered part of our "redemption right".

The Bible clearly teaches that there is a connection between disease and sin. Sickness and disease came into the world as a result of the fall, and were among the curses which God pronounced for evildoing.

Deut. 28:22, "Yahweh will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with fiery heat, with the sword, with blight, and with mildew. They will pursue you until you perish."

Furthermore the physical creation is subject to bondage and futility because of sin. Sickness and diseases are symptoms of this.

Rom. 8:22-23, "For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. Not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body."

Jesus occasionally linked forgiveness of sins and physical healing, as did James.

Mk. 2:9-11, "Which is easier, to tell the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven;' or to say, 'Arise, and take up your bed, and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – he said to the paralytic – "I tell you, arise, take up your mat, and go to your house."

Jam. 5:16, "Confess your offenses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

And, of course, Isaiah had prophesied that the Suffering Servant's death would have physical benefits for his people, a prophecy which Jesus made a point of fulfilling:

Isa. 53:5, "...and with his wounds we are healed."

Mat. 8:17, "When evening came, they brought to him many possessed with demons. He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases."

14.2. Argument against

The Bible does not teach that illness is always the direct result of sin. It teaches that God uses it in different ways.

Jn. 9:2-3, "His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but, that the works of God might be revealed in him."

Physical healing was not always linked with forgiveness of sins. For example:

- Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Mk. 7:24-30).
- Centurion's servant (Mat. 8:5-13).
- Demon-possessed boy (Mk. 9:14-29).

Although Isa. 53:4 refers to physical and mental illness and distress, it does not necessarily mean that Jesus vicariously bore these for us. Rather, it could mean: "bearing our burdens sympathetically".

For instance, in Mat. 8:17 and in Gal. 6:2 the Greek work used means "bearing another's burdens sympathetically", not vicariously.

Although the atonement cancels the effects of the fall, some of the benefits will not be realized until the end of time.

Rom. 8:19-25, "For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. Not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for that which he sees? But if we hope for that which we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

If the atonement covered all our physical ailments, then we should expect all Christians to be healed of their sicknesses. Obviously, this is not the case.

2 Cor. 12:7-9, "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, that I should not be exalted excessively. Concerning this thing, I begged the Lord three times that it might depart from me. He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on me."

Physical healing is not a guarantee, nor is it always the best way forward.

Rom. 8:10, "If Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of righteousness."

Phil. 3:20-21, *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself."*

Healing will come. It is part of the eschatological reality, a foretaste of which we sometimes get to witness in the here-and-now as an authentication of what will take place in the future.

15. Is penal substitution the only way to understand Christ's atoning work?

As we have already seen, YES. However, in the course of history a number of other views on Christ's atoning work have been put forward. Some posit a result of PSA at its heart (notably the "Christus Victor" model), but most do not have a sound Biblical basis.

It is, in fact, amazing how the doctrine of PSA is resisted. Here are some classic alternatives:

15.1. "Christus Victor"

This idea teaches that the central aspect of Christ's work on the cross was the fact that he defeated the powers of sin, death and hell.

Response: Christ's winning the victory over death and hell was certainly accomplished at Calvary, but he did so by winning the victory over sin (which involved penal substitution) and thus causing people to enter into a right relationship with God. This made them eligible to receive all the blessings that flow from that new reality. He won the victory by making it legally possible for God to act graciously towards sinners. The actual victory over sin in the lives of believers then begins to be accomplished through the new birth. There is no victory over sin without the new birth.

In other words, the blessings of Christ's victory are derivative, the result of him offering penal substitutionary atonement.

15.2. The Recapitulation Theory

First taught by the church father Irenaeus, it holds that Christ "recapitulated", i.e., "gathered up in himself", all the stages through which mankind had lived and, in doing so, transforms mankind morally. (Note that this was only a part of Irenaeus' rich understanding of the atonement.)

Think of it as Christ being God the Father's "summary statement"; he is everything Adam should have been. In so doing he reversed the course of disobedience which started with Adam. In other words, it holds that by virtue of Christ being the "second Adam" who took the place of the first Adam as head over the human race, mankind overcame its collective guilt

through Christ's righteous life on its behalf. It holds that immortality is the great gift granted back to mankind as a result of Christ's saving work as the fulfiller of the law. In doing so he, as it were, infused righteousness back into the human race.

This view is commonly held by Eastern Orthodox churches. It really emphasized Christ in his humanity, against the Gnostic idea that physicality is of lesser worth.

Response: the focus here is more on Christ's humanity than on his death. It does not recognize that Christ "became sin" for individual believers, and it merges justification into sanctification.

15.3 "Ransom Paid to Satan" Theory

First espoused by certain theologians of the early church, such as Origen. It is based on verses which use the word ransom to describe Christ's work.

Mat. 20:28, *"The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Mk. 10:45, *"For the Son of Man also came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

It holds that at the fall Satan became the ruler of this world, including having dominion over man. Thus he could demand whatever price he wanted, and chose the blood of Christ. Hence the ransom was not paid to God but to Satan. However, Satan was deceived by God into accepting a ransom more powerful and greater than he.

Origen taught that Satan was fooled by Christ's death, much like a mouse is deceived by a piece of cheese in a mouse trap or a fish by bait on a hook. Gregory of Nyssa wrote that "the deity was hidden under the veil of nature, so that, as with a ravenous fish, the hook of the deity might be gulped down along with the bait of the flesh". This Satan could not handle, because although he had dominion over "flesh" he did not have dominion over God.

In short, as a result of Adam's sin, mankind came to be owned by Satan. Christ's death purchased, or bought back, mankind from Satan and in the process brought about Satan's undoing.

Response: This position is wrong for the Bible clearly teaches that the ransom was paid to God.

Heb. 9:14, *"How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without defect to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"*

15.4. The Moral Influence/Example Theory

Proposes that the atonement is a display of God's love, not the satisfaction of his justice. God's love, as displayed in the death of Christ, exercises such a powerful moral influence on people that it causes them to repent of their sin and turn to God.

First taught by Peter Abelard, it is one of the central ideas of Protestant liberalism.

It teaches that there was no obstacle that needed to be removed so that sinners be restored to a right relationship with God. Man, by nature, is considered spiritually and morally capable of living according to God's will without divine intervention. God does not demand retributive justice; he does not demand satisfaction for sin.

It is closely related to the Example Theory of Socinius, which holds that in his life and death Christ demonstrated to mankind the nature of obedience, and as such became an example for all. The Socinians held that Jesus was an ordinary man chosen by God to provide an example for mankind by dying on the cross. In doing so Christ encouraged man to return to God.

Response: It minimizes God's holiness, absolute justice and righteous wrath. It makes God's love for man his determining attribute, and reduces the death of Christ to its subjective benefits, not to an objective meeting of the demands of a righteous God. Nor does it take into account the fact that man cannot save himself, ignores the Biblical teaching that Christ's death was a payment for sins (e.g. 1 Pet. 2:21), and denies (or at least holds to the relative unimportance of) the deity of Christ.

15.5. The Satisfaction theory

Sometimes called the commercial theory, it was first put forward by Anselm in his book *Cur Deus Homo*, "Why did God become man?" According to Anselm, mankind's sin consisted of not giving God the honour and dignity which it owed him. God's honour had to be vindicated, and Christ's death honoured God, thus restoring his dignity, for which God rewarded him. However, Christ did not need this reward, so he passed it on to sinners in the form of salvation. His death was an act of infinite merit which he passed on to sinners. This is the predominant Roman Catholic view.

Put another way, God is like an overlord whose honour was offended. Christ's death satisfied this wounded honour because sinful man could not do so by itself. Only a divine being could do so, yet that being also had to be

a human in order to represent man. Jesus, the perfect God-man satisfied God's honor. He also gathered a rich store of merit which he now dispenses.

Response: This differs from PSA, which focuses on God's justice, not his dignity. There is no thought in the satisfaction theory of Christ bearing the penalty for sin. Also, it is entirely external, giving no place for the spiritual and moral renewal of man in the Holy Spirit. There is no place for the union of Christ and the believer. It also denies the absolute necessity of the death of Christ, as God's honor could conceivably have been restored some other way.

15.6. The Governmental (or Moral) theory

Maintained by Grotius (1583-1645), the governmental theory emphasizes the depth of God's wrath against sin. Sin is violation of the laws of a holy and just God and, as the righteous judge he must punish it. However, his dominant attribute is love, as a result of which he is not forced to punish the sinner; it is within his right to absolve them should he wish to do so. Christ's atonement shows both the fact that God punishes sin, but also his mercy and grace.

According to this theory God can relax the severity of the law so that there is no need for an exact equivalent. Thus penal substitution comes to mean that Christ's death was a substitute for *a* penalty, not *the* penalty required by law. Furthermore, Christ's death was not a punishment, for he could not be punished. He was perfect, after all. Christ's death was a token payment to God for man's sins. Thus God upheld the moral government of the universe while setting aside the law which required that sin be punished.

God did not actually need to send Christ to the cross to make this token payment—he could have absolved him of guilt by relaxing his own laws, had he chosen to do so. However, he chose to send Christ to the cross because he wanted to maintain the moral fibre of the universe and underscore the seriousness of sin and his hatred of it.

According to this theory punishment cannot be transferred to another. What Christ's atonement accomplished was that it made punishment unnecessary by demonstrating that God upholds the overall moral equilibrium in the universe.

On the basis of repentance and a repudiation of sin, people can now approach God, whose sense of morality has been satisfied. As such, it underscores the fact that God is the moral ruler of the world.

Mankind will be saved when they see how horrible sin is and what it cost God. This will lead him to repentance and a desire henceforth to resist sin.

Response: Christ's death was not one of several options God could choose from but was the only way for the absolutely holy, righteous God to be propitiated. It HAD to be done this way, and it could only be done once, because there was only one person who could do it—who, once he had become like those whose place he took, remained so forever!

15.7. The Mystical Theory of Schleiermacher

Think of the German Friederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) as the "sense of dependency" guy: Christ modeled perfect dependence on God the Father. Furthermore, by becoming a man Christ's divine life entered into human life, and was thus able to effect a great change in mankind. True Christianity consists of living with a constant sense of dependency on God.

Response: This, like the recapitulation theory, emphasizes Christ's incarnation more than his death. In other words, the focus is on Bethlehem, not Calvary. It is about what Christ's life did for all of mankind, rather than what he accomplished for "his people" through his death and resurrection. Christianity is about nurturing a sense of dependency on the living Christ.

15.8. The atonement as necessary to avert the wrath of God is seen as inconsistent with the idea that God is a God of love

Since the Enlightenment at least, the notion of a wrathful God has been rejected by many theologians.

Some scholars (e.g. C. H. Dodd) argued that atonement should be understood as expiation. Expiation in this sense means 'cancelling' or 'dismissing'. In other words, sins are expiated, not propitiated. God simply cancels the threatened penalty for transgressions. As if he says, "I told you I would punish you, but I have decided not to."

God is too loving and kind and gracious to demand satisfaction when someone breaks one of his laws. Forgiveness is simply given. This is held by many in the now somewhat passé emerging church movement.

Response: The Bible teaches that atonement involves propitiation, the turning away of wrath by an offering. It did not just expiate in the sense of dismissing sin, it satisfied God's justice.

When the love of God becomes the primary characteristic of God to which all other biblical teachings have to be subordinated, you get a distorted picture of God. You begin talking about 'original goodness'. Theologians like Steve Chalke (b. 1955) do exactly that.

God certainly loves sinners (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 4:8, 10, 16; 1 Tim. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 2:20)! It was this love which moved him to provide a legally acceptable solution to sin so that sinners can escape from his wrath!

15.9. Jesus' crucifixion showed his sincerity in asking God for the favour of forgiving people's sin

The crucifixion was unnecessary. All people must do to be reconciled to God is ask sincerely for it. Moral conversion is enough.

For his part, Jesus 'atoned' for sin by asking God for this favour. "Basically, nothing more or less is required for the atonement than Jesus' intercession" (Winter, *The Atonement*, p. 90).

Response: Undermines the idea that God's righteous justice needs to be satisfied.

15.10. Jesus' crucifixion was nothing but a martyrdom

God punishes people for sin by letting them experience the natural consequences of their actions, not by sacrificing his own Son. Salvation is achieved through the dispelling of human wilfulness and ignorance. Christ did not actually die for our sins, but allowed himself to die in order to identify himself with this sin-cursed world. These assertions are heard from the pulpit in liberal churches.

Response: The similarity to ancient Gnosticism is remarkable: get rid of ignorance and you will be saved!

God certainly permits mankind to experience at least some of the natural consequences of their sin (Rom. 1:18-23). However, man's sin also provokes God's righteous wrath (Col. 3:5-6; Rom. 2:5; 1 Thes. 5:2-3; 2 Thes. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:4-10) – a wrath appeased through Christ's penal substitutionary atonement.

2 Cor. 5:21, "*For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

15.11. It is unjust for someone to be punished for the sins of another

This rejects the idea that one can take the place of another. Thus PSA doesn't work because it is considered unfair for one person to suffer instead of another. After all, the Bible states that "*The soul that sins, it will die*" (Ezek. 18:20).

This, essentially, is the position of Islam, which denies the death of Christ.

Response: God instituted the principle of representation back in the Garden of Eden. Two individuals represented the human race: Adam and Christ (1 Cor. 15:42-39). Adam did so to our detriment and Christ to our benefit (Rom.

5:12-19). Christ can represent man inasmuch as he is fully man. He can also represent mankind, inasmuch as his personal worth as God is infinite.

15.12. Doctrines such as PSA should not be a cause for division in the church

Response: Penal substitution is the heart of the gospel message. If you reject it, you end up accepting a different kind of gospel and a different kind of Christ.

The Bible certainly teaches that unwarranted division is bad (see Eph. 4:2-3, Phil. 2:1-5), but it also teaches that certain teachings cannot be compromised. They must be rejected out of hand.

Gal. 1:8-9, "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you any good news other than that which we preached to you, let him be cursed. As we have said before, so I now say again: if any man preaches to you any good news other than that which you received, let him be cursed."

1 Cor. 5:11, "But as it is, I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother who is a sexual sinner, or covetous, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or an extortionist. Do not even eat with such a person."

1 Cor. 16:22, "If any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed."

2 Jn. 9-10, "Whoever transgresses and does not remain in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. He who remains in the teaching, the same has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you, and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not welcome him."

See also 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 3:9-10

15.13. PSA is a western concept introduced during the Protestant Reformation

Response: This is simply not true. From the time of Paul to the present, substitutionary atonement has been at the core of Biblical Christianity. Herewith some affirmations from major theologians living prior to the Protestant Reformation, most of whom were non-western:³⁶

Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 A.D.): "If, then, the Father of all wishes His Christ for the whole human family to take upon Him the curses of all, knowing that He had been crucified and was dead, He would raise him up, why do you argue about Him, who submitted to these things according to the Father's will, as if he were accursed, and do not rather bewail yourselves?" (*Pierced for our Transgressions*, p. 165).

³⁶ Quotes in this section from Jeffrey, S., Ovey M., & Sack A., *Pierced for our Transgression*, Crossway, 2007.

Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 275-339 A.D.): “And the Lamb of God... was chastised on our behalf, and suffered a penalty He did not owe, but which we owed because of the multitude of our sins; and so, He became the cause of the forgiveness of sins, because He received death for us, and transferred to Himself the scourging, the insults, and the dishonour which were due us, and drew upon Himself the appointed curse, being made a curse for us.” (*Proof of the Gospel*; in *Pierced for our Transgressions*, p. 166-167).

Athanasius (c. 300-373 A.D.): “The Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death; yet He Himself, as the Word, being immortal and the Father’s Son, was such as could not die. For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, though belonging to the Word Who is above all, might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all, and, itself, remaining incorruptible through His indwelling, might thereafter put an end to corruption for all others as well, by the grace of the resurrection. It was by surrendering to death the body which He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for His human brethren by the offering of the equivalent. For naturally, since the Word of God was above all, when He offered His own temple and bodily instrument as a substitute for the life of all, He fulfilled in his death all that was required.” (*On the Incarnation*; in *Pierced for our Transgressions*, p. 172).

Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 330-390 A.D.): “As for my sake He was called a curse, Who destroyed my curse; and sin, who taketh away the sin of the world; and became a new Adam to take the place of the old, just so He makes my disobedience His own as Head of the whole body. As long then as I am disobedient and rebellious, both by denial of God and by my passions, so long Christ is also called disobedient on my account.” (*Theological Orations IV*; in *Pierced for our Transgressions*, p. 174).

Ambrose of Milan (339-397 A.D.): “And so then, Jesus took flesh that He might destroy the curse of sinful flesh, and He became a curse that a blessing might overwhelm a curse, uprightness might overwhelm sin, forgiveness might overwhelm the sentence, and life might overwhelm death. He also took up death that the sentence might be fulfilled and satisfaction might be given for the judgment, the curse placed on sinful flesh even to death. Therefore, nothing was done contrary to God’s sentence when the terms of that sentence were fulfilled, for the curse was unto death but grace is after death.” (*Flight from the World*; in *Pierced for our Transgressions*, p. 175).

John Chrysostom (c. 350-407 A.D.): “If one that was himself a king, beholding a robber and malefactor under punishment, gave his well-beloved son, his only begotten and true, to be slain; and transferred the death and the guilt as well, from him to his son (who was himself of no such character), that he might both save the condemned man and clear him from his evil reputation; and then if, having subsequently promoted him to great dignity, he had yet, after thus saving him and advancing him to that glory unspeakable, been outraged by the person that had received such treatment: would not that man, if he had any sense, have chosen ten thousand deaths rather than appear guilty of so great ingratitude? This then let us also consider with ourselves, and groan bitterly for the provocations we have offered our Benefactor; nor let us therefore presume, because though outraged He bears it with long-suffering; but rather for this very reason be full of remorse.” (*Sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:21*; in *Pierced for our Transgressions*, p. 176).

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.): “But as Christ endured death as a man, and for man; so also, Son of God as He was, ever living in His own righteousness, but dying for our offences, He submitted as man, and for man, to bear the curse which accompanies death. And as He died in the flesh which He took in bearing our punishment, so also, while ever blessed in His own righteousness, He was cursed for our offences, in the death which He suffered in bearing our punishment.” (*Against Faustus the Manichean*; in *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, p. 178-179).

Cyril of Alexandria (375-444 A.D.): “The Only-begotten was made man, bore a body by nature at enmity with death, and became flesh so that, enduring the death which was hanging over us as the result of our sin, he might abolish sin; and further, that he might put an end to the accusations of Satan, inasmuch as we have paid in Christ himself the penalties for the charges of the sin against us: ‘For he bore our sins, and was wounded because of us’, according to the voice of the prophet.” (*De adoratione et culta*; in *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, p. 180).

15.14. PSA does not meet the felt needs of people today

Response: From the beginning people considered PSA as a stumbling block and foolishness.

1 Cor. 1:23-24, “*We preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.*”

Just because people in their natural state suppress the truth and seek to create alternative, more acceptable teachings is no reason for the church of Jesus Christ to change the basic gospel message!

15.15. PSA reflects the sacrificial concepts of ancient pagan religions

Response: The opposite is true: pagan sacrifices are distortions of the sacrificial system which God instituted at the very beginning of human history (see Gen. 3:21, 4:1-8, Heb. 11:4).

In the pagan sacrificial system, the pagan gods did not offer themselves as sacrifices for those who worshipped them; they demanded that the devotee make the sacrifice himself in order to try to appease or win the favour of the gods. It was never clear what a perfectly satisfactory sacrifice might be, for the Judeo-Christian idea of the covenant keeping God who clearly revealed his will, and held both himself and his people to that will, was absent. No wonder the OT repeatedly forbade the imitation of the pagan sacrificial system (see Deut. 12:4, 31; 18:9; Lev. 18, 2 Kin. 17:15-17; 21:2; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:2, 6; Jer. 7:31; 19:5; Ezek. 20:31).

The nature of an acceptable sacrifice was clearly spelled out in the OT (See Lev. 1-7; Ex. 29-30; Num. 15:28-29). The OT sacrificial system functioned like a credit card system up to the time when God himself would pay the debts accrued over the centuries by means of the Christ event.

15.16. God is too loving to demand penal substitutionary atonement

This is the idea of PSA as a form of “cosmic child abuse”: the Biblical model is restoration, not retribution. (The minute you hear this statement, warning lights should go off!)

In personal relationships we are certainly called upon not to act out of personal revenge but to deal gently with sinners (see Mat. 5:38-39; 1 Pet. 3:9). However, this does not nullify the concept of retributive justice. The state is charged with administering retributive justice (Rom. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2:14) and so is God (Rom. 12:9).

The awfully misleading term “cosmic child abuse” was first used by Brian McClaren and Steve Chalke, and has since been picked up by various others as well. Those who make this assertion fail to realize that Christ was not an unwilling victim, but that he freely, willingly, voluntarily, offered himself to pay the penalty for sin out of love for sinners and in order to glorify himself. It distorts and/or misunderstands the doctrine of the Trinity (see 15:19).

Mat. 20:28, “*The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” (See also Mk. 10:45)

Jn. 10:15, 17-18, "I lay down my life for the sheep... Therefore the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down by myself."

Jn. 17:1, "Jesus said these things (just prior to his crucifixion), and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may also glorify you."

Gal. 1:4, "[Christ] gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father."

Gal. 2:20, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."

Eph. 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the assembly, and gave himself up for it."

Phil. 2:8-10, "And being found in human form, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, yes, the death of the cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow..."

1 Tim. 2:6, "[Christ] gave himself as a ransom for all."

Heb. 12:2, "Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Rev. 5:12, "Worthy is the Lamb who has been killed to receive the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing!"

15.17. Exacting payment for sin in PSA means God does not really forgive, as there is nothing left to forgive: everything has been paid for!

Response: God did not forgive our sins when Jesus accomplished his work on the cross. He forgives sins and imputes Christ's righteousness to us when we personally believe and accept the benefits of Christ's work for ourselves. Christ's life and work provided the payment for sin which offended God. Actual forgiveness comes when we accept that payment. Before that we were "dead in trespasses and sin" (Eph. 2:1).

Ac. 16:31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved..."

15.18. If Christ provided PSA for all, then all will be saved.

Response: This confuses the concepts of the provision of salvation and the application of salvation. Christ's penal substitutionary atonement was more than sufficient to atone for the sin of the world. However, it only becomes effective (applied) to those who believe it to be true for them.

15.19. PSA destroys the unity of the godhead.

PSA would mean that Father and Son acted independent of each other. Either that, or the One God would be both the subject and object of an action.

Response: A common conceptual danger associated with propitiation is the division of God’s attributes between the persons of the Godhead. God the Father is perceived as full of justice and wrath and Jesus as the loving saviour. This notion divides God the Father from God the Son, as if they disagreed in attitude, purpose or will. It is, in fact, easy to mislead people if we present the gospel like this: “So God said I must punish the people for their sin. But Jesus said, ‘No, I shall go into the world and take the punishment in their place’.” Bible answer? John 3:16

Jn. 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

1 Jn. 4:10, In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

	Unbiblical division		Biblical answer
	God the Father	God the Son	
Attitude to people:	wrath	love	1 John 4:10 (see above). John 10:30
Purpose:	wants to condemn us	wants to save us	John 17:4, <i>I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.</i> See also 1 John 4:14
Will:	sent the Son as an unwilling substitute	sent against his will to be the victim of the Father’s wrath	John 10:10, <i>I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.</i> See also John 14-18 and the numerous references quoted above.

You cannot overemphasize the fact that God’s love is the source and not the result of the atonement. In other words, propitiation is the act of God in which he frees himself to act in love towards sinners.

Neither person of the Trinity acted independent of the others. There is total agreement on all activities undertaken by the godhead. Each person is involved in the acts of the other persons of the Trinity, though not in the same way. The Son effected PSA, though in total dependence on the Father and the Spirit.

15.20. PSA implies that God is bound to a set of rules outside of himself which forced him to sacrifice his Son

God was forced to do something against his will by outside factors.

Response: God's law is intrinsic to himself. It is not an outside factor but reflects his character. Because God is true to his character and his word, he is knowable. He doesn't act in any arbitrary manner, nor did he provide for PSA against his will. Although our sins are an affront to him, it pleased him to provide a means through which sinners can be reconciled with who he is in and of himself.

Heb. 12:2, "*Jesus... who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame...*"

15.21. PSA is too individualistic. It does not address larger political, social and environmental concerns

Response: PSA deals with each individual's core problem: personal sin and culpability before a holy God. Once that has been dealt with Christians seek to be "salt and light" to their own societies (Mat. 5:13-16; Phil. 2:14-15).

16. What is "The New Perspective on Paul"?

In his books *What St Paul really said* (Lion, 1997) and *The New Testament and the People of God*, (SPCK, 1992), the Anglican scholar N.T. Wright (b. 1948) re-states the gospel mainly in terms of the victory of Christ on the cross over the powers of evil. He moves the concept of justification from being the basis of our acceptance by God to becoming God's declaration of the covenant relationship of the church with Christ as Lord. In doing so he relegates justification by faith from being at the heart of the gospel to being a polemical device used by the apostle Paul in debate with Jewish opponents.

Wright claims that in Romans and Galatians Paul was not teaching how the individual sinner is put right with God, but that membership of the covenant community was open to all regardless of race or culture. Paul's perspective, according to him, is all about removing the obstacles that prevent Jews and Gentiles from having fellowship together. Thus justification is not a God-man thing anymore, but a man-man thing which removes all impediments to becoming part of the body of Christ.

One outcome of his reinterpretation of justification by faith is that the doctrine no longer stands in the way of ecumenical union and co-operation with the Roman Catholic Church.

See Appendix I for a fuller treatment of The New Perspective.

XIV

Soteriology: The Doctrine of Salvation

*"You are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls."
(1 Peter 1:9)*



IN THIS CHAPTER we look at how people can appropriate the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement. This matters, for this is what makes someone a Christian. We also look at the blessings which flow from the appropriation of PSA.

1. What does Christ's atoning work seek to save us from?

1.1. The ultimate calamity: the wrath of God

Rom. 1:18, *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."*

Rom. 2:5, *"But according to your hardness and unrepentant heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath, revelation, and of the righteous judgment of God."*

Rom. 5:9, *"Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him (i.e. Christ)."*

Eph. 5:6, *"Let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of these things, the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience." (And who is not disobedient?)*

Col. 3:6, *"The wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience."*

If you can digest this then everything else falls into place.

God's anger is not some kind of vindictive satisfaction that comes from punishing sin. God's anger is the attribute which works to right that which is wrong. His desire for rightness, righteousness and justice is so strong that he will not stop until all who are wrong and sinful have either been transformed into that which is right and true or have received their just recompense.

It was the Triune God’s anger which led to the cross – if our Triune God had not been angry enough with sin to want to do something about it, there would have been no cross, and thus no justice, mercy, or hope of a final restoration. It is because of his righteous anger with sin that we can be sure that everything sin has ruined will be made right again!

Is it really right to put your arms around someone and tell them that God loves them? Would it not be better to tell them that God is not kindly disposed towards them, that, in fact, they are under God’s judgment, his wrath, BUT that he offers his love to them – on his terms? If they then ask what those terms are you have a chance to share the gospel of repentance and faith.

1.2. The ultimate expression of God’s wrath is hell

a. Definition

Hell is a place of eternal, conscious and perfectly righteous punishment which those who fall under God’s judgment will experience. Because God will justly judge each person according to their works, hell will be experienced differently by different people.

Definition	Jesus’ teaching	Other Bible references
<i>a place</i>	Mat. 5:29-30; 10:28; Luke 12:5	2 Pet. 2:4
<i>of punishment</i>	Mat. 25:46	2 Thes. 1:8-9; Heb. 10:29; Eph. 5:6.
<i>of eternal punishment</i>	Mat. 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43, 48	Dan. 12:2; Eph. 2:3; 2 Thes.1:8; Rev. 14:11; 19:3; 20:10
<i>of conscious punishment</i>	Mat. 13:42, 50; 25:30; Mk. 9:48; Lk. 16:22-24, 28	Rev. 14:11
<i>of perfectly righteous punishment</i>	Lk. 10:13-14	Ac. 17:31 (see below)
<i>experienced differently by different people</i>	Lk. 10:13-14	Rev. 20:13
<i>for people who fall under God’s judgment</i>	Lk. 13:27	Rom. 2:5; Eph. 5:6; Heb. 11:29

b. God will judge each individual’s works in perfect righteousness

Hell is not Satan’s domain! In fact, he lives in terror of it! (Mat. 8:31-32). Hell is exposure to the perfectly righteous judgment of God. That is why people will experience it differently.

Gen. 18:25, *"Far from you (God) to do things like that, to kill the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be like the wicked. May that be far from you. Shouldn't the Judge of all the earth do right?"*

Jer. 17:10, *"I, Yahweh, search the mind, I try the heart, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings."*

Mat. 12:20, *"He (Jesus) will not break a bruised reed. He will not quench a smoking flax, until he leads justice to victory."*

Lk. 10:13-14, *"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than for you."*

Ac. 17:31, *"He [God] has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained."*

Rom. 2:6-8, *"God will pay back to everyone according to their works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory, honor, and incorruptibility, eternal life; but to those who are self-seeking, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, will be wrath and indignation, oppression and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."*

Rom. 2:12, *"For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without the law. As many as have sinned under the law will be judged by the law."*

1 Cor. 4:5, *"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each man will get his praise from God."*

2 Tim. 4:8, *"...the Lord, the righteous judge..."*

1 Pet. 1:17, *"If you call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judges according to each man's work, pass the time of your living as foreigners here in reverent fear."*

Heb. 2:2, *"...and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense."*

Rev. 19:11, *"I saw the heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it is called Faithful and True. In righteousness he judges and makes war."*

Rev. 20:12-13, *"I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and*

Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works."

c. Use of symbolic language to describe hell

The only way we can describe realities beyond the way we experience reality in time and space are by means of pictures, symbols and analogical language. That, however, does not mean we can ignore what they say: as divinely inspired pictures they will not mislead, though they cannot tell us everything.

Gehenna: a place outside Jerusalem which had been used for child sacrifice (2 Chron. 28:3), and in Jesus' time had long been used as a place for burning rubbish (2 Kin. 23:10. Example: Mat. 5:22; Mk. 9:43, 45, 48.

Hades = name of the Greek God of the underworld (brother of Zeus), which came to be associated with the underworld itself. Lk. 16:23; Rev. 20:13-14.

Fire or a lake of fire: Mk. 9:44, 48; Rev. 19:20; 20:14.

Outer darkness: Mat. 8:12; 22:13; Jude 13 (note fire and darkness are contradictory > clearly symbolic).

d. Alternate views on hell

i. Annihilation

Hell is non-existence. After the judgment (either immediately after or after a limited time of punishment), those who will not live forever with God will cease to exist. They are destroyed, annihilated.

They will not be punished with painful torment, but they will not be with God for eternity, because God will no longer sustain them. Drawn from such passages as:

2 Thes. 1:9, *"When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, giving vengeance to those who do not know God, and to those who do not obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus, who will pay the penalty: eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might."*

The phrase "eternal destruction" is understood as referring to non-existence.

1 Jn. 4:16, *"We know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and he who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him."*

The argument here is that there is an apparent contradiction between God's great love and the idea of eternal suffering and punishment.

Response: In the Bible the word destruction does not refer to annihilation but to ruin (i.e., 1 Tim. 6:9).

Furthermore, Jesus says at the end of his description of judgment in Mat. 25:46: "*Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life*". Eternal is used of both the punishment and the reward of life.

Then there is also the issue of justice. As seen above, both the OT prophets and the NT writers state that everyone will be judged according to what they have done. If so, then there should be varying degrees of punishment. If unbelievers merely ceased to exist, there is no difference in the punishment.

ii. Conditional Immortality

Argues that only God is immortal by nature (1 Tim. 6:15-16), and that immortality is a gift from God, received when a believer first believes or at the time of the final judgment. "Nobody survives death except those to whom God gives life" [Stott, quoted in Motyer 1996, 33].

This argument is based on passages which describe sin as death and eternal life as a gift from God.

Rom. 6:23, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

It also interprets passages which describe death as destruction as "ceasing to exist". As we have seen, however, the Bible also describes death as eternal conscious punishment (see 1.2.a)

e. Conclusion to questions about hell

Christians differ but...

- we must be guided by Scripture and not by our emotional response.
- hell is God's righteous wrath, not Satan's vindictive torturing.
- the doctrine should fill our hearts of believers with gratitude. The beauty of Christ's atoning work is that it frees us from any and all divine judgment!

Rom. 8:1, "*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*"

Eph. 2:12-13. *“Remember (you gentiles) that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”* (NIV)

1 Pet. 1:9, *“you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”* (NIV)

- The doctrine should add urgency to our prayer and our evangelism.

Rom. 9:2-3, *“I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brothers’ sake, my relatives according to the flesh.”*

Jude 22-23, *“Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.”* (NIV)

2. Who, exactly, does Jesus save from God’s wrath?

2.1. Christ died “for sinners”, i.e., for those who cannot save themselves

Rom. 5:8, *“But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*

2.2. Christ died “for all”, “for everyone”, “for whoever”, and “for the world”

Jn. 1:29, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

Jn. 3:14-17, *“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.”*

Jn. 4:42, *“This is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”*

Rom. 5:18-19, *“So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. For as through the one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous.”*

2 Cor. 5:14-15, 19 *“For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, that one died for all, therefore all died. He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and*

rose again... God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses."

1 Tim. 2:4-5, "(God) who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

1 Tim. 4:10, "For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we have set our trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."

Tit. 2:11, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men."

2 Pet. 3:9, "The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Heb. 2:9, "But we see him who has been made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for everyone."

1 Jn. 2:2, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."

Clearly, Christ's atoning work was of sufficient merit to cover everyone's sins. Yet, equally clearly, not everyone is saved.

Did God intend from eternity to apply Christ's altogether sufficient atoning work to only a limited number of people? (The doctrine of limited atonement). Does the Bible not teach that God deals equitably with all men?

Rom. 2:11, "For there is no partiality with God."

Ac. 10:34-35, "Peter opened his mouth and said, "Truly I perceive that God does not show favoritism; but in every nation he who fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him."

What is meant by "the world" and "all" in these verses? In what sense did Christ die for the world? Is "the world" merely a euphemism?

2.3. Christ died for those granted him by God the Father before the foundation of the world

Jn. 17:2, (Jesus' high priestly prayer) "For you (Father) granted him (Jesus) authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him." (NIV)

This has to do with the doctrine of election. Before we get to that let's look at what it means to be saved.

3. What does “being saved” mean?

Being saved has a three-fold meaning: I have been saved from the penalty of sin and am now in a right relationship with God, which is saving me from the power of sin over me. One day, however, I will be saved from the very presence of sin.

1 Pet. 1:9, “*You are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*” (NIV)

3.1. Past tense: saved as a once-for-all reality

a. By the life and death of Christ (the doctrine of Christology)

Rom. 5:6, 8, “*For while we were yet weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”

This once and for all event was all that was needed to accomplish salvation. See also Rom. 3:23-24, 8:1; Eph. 1:7.

a. By personal conversion (the doctrine of soteriology)

Ac. 2:37-38, “*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do? Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*”

3.2. Present tense: being saved in the here and now from dominating power of sin

I am being saved from sins controlling power over me (the doctrine of sanctification).

2 Cor. 2:15, “*For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved.*” (NIV)

1 Pet. 2:2, “*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.*” (NIV)

3.3. Future tense: saved as a future reality

I shall be saved from the very presence of sin (the doctrines of eschatology and glorification).

Rom. 13:11, “*Do this, knowing the time, that it is already time for you to awaken out of sleep, for salvation is now nearer to us than when we first believed.*”

1 Thes. 1:10, “*wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.*”

4. What does it mean for God to elect people unto salvation?

The doctrine of election has been very divisive in Protestant theology. Both the Hebrew *bawkheer* and Greek *eklectos* are translated as election. The terms mean “selection”, “choice”, or “picking out”.

In the Bible the words are used to indicate how a particular people or categories of people are “picked out” for specific purposes:

4.1. The concept of election (*bawkheer*) in the OT

a. God elected (chose) Christ to accomplish the work of salvation

Isa. 42:1, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights...”

b. God elected (chose) OT Israel to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”

God chose Israel because of his covenant faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel’s adherence to that covenant would enable it to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Ex. 19:5-6, “If you will indeed obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.”

Deut. 7:6-7, “For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God. Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, above all peoples who are on the face of the earth. Yahweh did not set his love on you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all peoples.”

Ac. 13:17, “The God of this people chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they stayed as aliens in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm, he led them out of it.”

Israel as a nation was elected (chosen), yet at the same time, Paul stated that God rejected it, at least for a season.

Rom. 11:7-8, “What then? That which Israel seeks for, that he did not obtain, but the chosen ones obtained it, and the rest were hardened. According as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.”

Rom. 11:28, “Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake. But concerning the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sake.”

In short, with respect to Israel as a nation, the notion of election is not used person-specific but with reference to a particular group of people who failed to accomplish what they were elected for.

c. God chose Israel's priests, kings and prophets to their respected tasks

Yet many of them died in their sins.

Deut. 21:5, "*The priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them Yahweh your God has chosen to minister to him, and to bless in Yahweh's name.*"
(Yet soon two sons of Aaron would be killed as a result of their sin).

King Saul was chosen by God and also died in his sin.

4.2. The concept of election (*eklectos*) in the NT

The concept of *eklectos* usually refers to either individuals, groups of people or particular types of people whom God chooses for a particular purpose.

a. Christ was elected (chosen) for a particular purpose

1 Pet. 2:4, "*(Christ) chosen by God..*"

b. The apostles were chosen for a particular purpose

Christ chose the apostles for a specific purpose, yet at least one, Judas, was unsaved – though he too served his purpose!

Lk. 6:13, "*When it was day, he called his disciples, and from them he chose twelve, whom he also named apostles.*"

There were many more disciples (see Luke 6:17), but Christ chose the twelve for the particular task he was calling them to.

Jn. 6:70-71, "*Jesus answered them, 'Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?' Now he spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for it was he who would betray him, being one of the twelve.*"

Ac. 1:2, "*He (Christ) had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.*"

Ac. 1:24, "*They prayed, and said, 'You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two you have chosen (to Judas' place).'*"

Ac. 9:15, "*But the Lord said to him (Ananias), 'Go your way, for he (Paul) is my chosen vessel to bear my name before the nations and kings, and the children of Israel.'*"

c. A remnant within Israel was chosen unto salvation

Rom. 11:5, 7, "*At this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace... That which Israel seeks for, that he did not obtain, but the chosen ones obtained it, and the rest were hardened.*"

d. God chose the foolish in the eyes of the world unto salvation

1 Cor. 1:27-28, "God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong; and God chose the lowly things of the world, and the things that are despised, and the things that are not, that he might bring to nothing the things that are."

e. God chose the church to be holy and bear spiritual fruit

Jn. 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain."

Eph. 1:4, "He [God] chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without defect before him in love."

Col. 3:12, "Put on therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, humility, and perseverance..."

1 Pet. 2:9, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

The majority of references in the Bible with respect to the concept of election refers to God choosing specific individuals or groups of people for specific purposes.

The Bible is also clear that just because God chose someone for a particular purpose did not mean that they necessarily fulfilled the task to which they were called!

However, the concept of divine election with respect to salvation is not absent. This takes us to the subject of predestination.

5. **What is predestination (or foreordination)?**

5.1. Definition

Predestination/foreordination means "to decide or determine (or decree) beforehand how something will take place". In Christian theology it means that God determines in advance that certain things will come to pass.

- Foreknowledge: the fact that God knows everything which will take place.
- Election: the fact that God chooses particular people or groups of people to accomplish particular purposes.
- Predestination/foreordination: the fact that God determines in advance what, how and when events take place.

5.2. What things did/does God predestine?

Does God predestine/foreordain (determine in advance) absolutely everything that comes to pass, or only everything pertaining to salvation? Are we mere piano keys in the hands of God, or is there more to the subject?

a. God predestined both that the atonement would be accomplished, and how

Ac. 4:27-28, "For truly, in this city against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever your hand and your council foreordained to happen."

b. God predestined that certain people be moved to accept God's grace in Christ and receive eternal life (i.e., that they be convicted of sin and regenerated to newness of life)

Ac. 13:48, "As the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God. As many as were appointed to eternal life believed."

c. God predestined that saved sinners will glorify God by becoming more Christ-like

Saved sinners are predestined to bring glory to God by being adopted as sons of God and by growing in Christ-likeness.

Rom. 8:29, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son..."

Eph. 1:5-6, 11-12 "In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace... In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory."

6. What is the Biblical order of salvation (the "ordo salutis")?

This question only exists for beings living within the framework of space and time. God, whose existence supersedes space and time, does not experience or will events as a sequence in time. All things are eternally present before him.

However, the Bible seems to describe human beings' experience of God's ways with them as follows:

foreknowledge > predestination > calling > justification > glorification

Rom. 8:29-30, *“For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified.”*

1 Pet. 1:1-2, *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen ones who are living as foreigners in the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood.”*

John Calvin seems to put predestination (i.e. God’s decreeing how things come to pass) first:

“The eternal predestination of God, by which before the fall of Adam he decreed what should take place concerning the whole human race and every individual, was fixed and determined.” (Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, p. 121)

“Everything is subject to God and ruled by his will and that when the world has done what it may, nothing happens other than what God decrees.” (Calvin, *Acts. Classic Commentaries*, p. 66)

However, Calvin did not seem to realize, at least not when writing these paragraphs, that at a fundamental level God exists outside time, that he exists and operates in an eternal present from which he sees all that has ever taken place and will take place in the same instant. This failure led to a debate in Calvinist circles between so-called supralapsarians and infralapsarians. Supralapsarians hold that God decreed who would go to heaven and who would go to hell before mankind’s fall into sin, while infralapsarians hold that God made that decision after Adam’s fall into sin. Calvin himself was a supralapsarian (see quotes above).

From a divine perspective, however, positing a temporal priority on the way God must do things is not tenable – though this does not exclude a logical priority. In other words, the concept of “what comes first” can be understood in two different senses: temporally and logically. Are we talking about the order in which things occur in time, or with respect to their logical sequence? From a divine perspective the *“ordo salutis”* does not hold in a temporal sense, though that does not exclude the concept in a logical sense. From the perspective of human experience, the Bible teaches that regeneration comes before faith and repentance in both a temporal and logical sense. It might be worth noting here that philosophically speaking the question of time is extremely complex (beyond the ability of this writer to grasp), and that the question of how God relates to time is even more difficult.

Some hold that placing predestination before foreknowledge leads to a philosophical problem: If God’s foreknowledge is based on his predetermined

decrees, can he only know that which he has predestined? In other words, does he only know that which actually comes to pass? Put another way, can God know that which he has not decreed, i.e., everything which does not actually take place, or counterfactuals? (See next question)

However, few Christians, including Calvin himself, would deny that God is truly omniscient, that he knows all that was, is and will be, as well as all that might have been, might be, and could have been.

7. What is the nature of God's foreknowledge?

7.1. God has absolute knowledge of the past, the present and the future (see omniscience), and of all counterfactuals

1 Sam. 23:11-13 describes an incident when David used an ephod to discern God's will to find out if Saul would attack him and if the men of Keilah would hand him over to Saul. God stated that both events would, indeed, take place. David then escaped from there and the events did not take place after all. In other words, David made use of God's counterfactual knowledge: under those particular circumstance this will happen, but if you change the circumstances the result will be different.

Some predictions given by prophets did not take place because people responded differently. These prophecies consisted of God's counterfactual knowledge about what would take place under certain circumstances which could be changed.

Jer. 38:17-18, " Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel, says: If you will go out to the king of Babylon's princes, then your soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and you shall live, and your house. But if you will not go out to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape out of their hand."

Jon. 3:1-10, Jonah's message of doom to the people of Nineveh which did not take place.

See also Isa. 38:1-5; Amos 7:1-6.

Jesus makes counterfactual statements (i.e., states how things which might have been but were/are not) about his own ministry: if the miracles he had done in Galilee had taken place in Sodom, Tyre or Sidon these cities would have repented (Mat. 11:20-24)

Jn. 15:22, 24, "If I had not come and spoken to them (i.e. the world), they would not have had sin... If I hadn't done among them the works which no one else did, they wouldn't have had sin."

7.2. Foreknowledge in the sense of omniscience (see 7.1) is not the same thing as predestination/foreordination

Although God knows all things this does not automatically mean he foreordained or predestined everything he knows (the traditional Augustinian/Calvinist position).

In fact, not even the certainty of particular future events automatically mean that they are determined by God, for he does not foreordain sinful intentions, thoughts and acts. He is not the author of evil. They are “freely chosen” acts which God has fully known about from eternity, but of which he is not the cause; in fact, he hates them!

Jam. 1:13-14, “Let no man say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.”

Prov. 6:16-19, “There are six things which Yahweh hates; yes, seven which are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood; a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness who utters lies, and he who sows discord among brothers.”

7.3. The concept of “middle knowledge” (also known as Molinism)

The idea of middle knowledge was developed by a Jesuit priest, Louis de Molina (1535-1600). He was opposed by the Dominicans, who were more Augustinian (i.e., deterministic) in their views. The debate became so heated that Pope Paul V forbade further argument on the subject.

Because the debate took place in the Roman Catholic world it did not really impact Protestant theology until a professor at Notre Dame, Alfred Freddoso, translated de Molina’s works into English. It has since been developed by the Christian philosophers Alvin Plantinga and William Lane Craig.

Middle knowledge is the idea that God completely knows the choices every human being would make under any kind of circumstance, including all the infinite number of circumstances which do not in actual fact take place.

Middle knowledge purportedly gives God the ability to order circumstances in ways which lead to his salvific purposes being accomplished without turning men into robots.

Middle knowledge holds that before God’s decree to create the world he knew both the range of possible worlds he could make (natural knowledge), as well as the range of worlds which would accomplish his purposes based on his knowledge of counterfactuals.

In other words, God knew in which world everyone would make choices which would lead them to align with his overall purpose of revealing the nature of who he is, and calling to himself a saved and sanctified people. This is the world he then chose to create.

The idea of middle knowledge tries to avoid the idea that people are mere “piano keys in the hand of God”. God is not like a puppet-master but more like the ultimate chess master.

By virtue of his omniscience God can orchestrate and order events according to his choosing without forcing the wills of human beings, yet all the while counteracting evil and working out his own plans and purposes.

Some see Molinism as Arminianism with a better apologetic, while others hold that it allows the classic Reformed statements of faith to cohere:

Westminster Confession, Sec. III, “*God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will or creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of secondary causes taken away, but rather established.*”

Thus in effect Molinism collapses into Calvinism.

8. What is meant by “calling”?

Christians sometimes use the word calling as an invitation to full-time Christian ministry. It may be an invitation from a church for someone to be their pastor, or the inward belief that a person should become a pastor or missionary.

The Bible uses the word “call” in different ways. In the sense of God calling people to be saved, the word is used in two ways. It is important to distinguish them.

8.1. God’s general, or universal, invitation to all men to turn to him

This is the *presentation* of the facts of the Gospel, an *invitation* to believe and the *promise* of salvation to those who believe.

It is outward or external because it reaches the ears but it might not reach the heart.

It is general or universal because it comes to everyone who hears it, and is not limited by human differences like age, nationality, class or religion.

It is the free offer of salvation, the presentation of the gospel.

Isa. 45:22, “*Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.*”

Isa. 55:1, "Come, everyone who thirsts, to the waters! Come, he who has no money, buy, and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Mat. 11:28, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest."

Mat. 22:9-10, "Go therefore to the intersections of the highways, and as many as you may find, invite to the marriage feast.' Those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good. The wedding was filled with guests."

Mat. 23:37, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!"

Mk. 16:16, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned."

Jn. 3:15-16, "Whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Ac. 2:14-40, Peter's message at Pentecost

Ac. 2:21, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Rom. 10:12-14, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

1 Tim. 2:3-4, "God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth..."

2 Pet. 3:9, "The Lord is... patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

1 Jn. 5:10, "Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son." (NIV)

Rev. 22:17, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' He who hears, let him say, 'Come!' He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely."

8.2. Calling as a divine summons

In this sense the word calling is "an act of God the Father in which he summons people to himself in such a way that they respond in saving faith."³⁷ This is sometimes referred to as the effective, or inward call.

³⁷ Grudem 1994, p. 693

The difference between the outward call and the inward call is like the difference between an invitation ("Please come to my party ...") and a summons or a royal command ("You will attend the court ...")

This summoning is conceptualized differently by Calvinists and Arminians. Calvinists speak of "effectual calling", which they hold to be irresistible, and Arminians speak of "prevenient grace" which they hold to be resistible.

In any case, neither the Calvinist nor the classic Arminian questions the fact that God must act first:

Mat. 1:21, *"You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins."* (Note: "his people" can be interpreted to mean Israel as a nation).

Mat. 20:28, *"The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* ("Many" does not mean "all")

Jn. 6:44, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."*

Jn. 17:2, 9, *"Even as you (Father) gave him (the Son) authority over all flesh, he will give eternal life to all whom you have given him.... I do not pray for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours."*

Ac. 2:39, *"For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far off, even as many as the Lord our God will call to himself."*

Ac. 13:48, *"As the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God. As many as were appointed to eternal life believed."*

Rom. 1:6-7, *"And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."* (NIV)

Rom. 8:30, *"Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified."*

1 Cor. 1:9, 23-24, *"God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord... we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God."*

Eph. 2:5-9, *"Even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus; for by grace you have been saved through faith, and*

that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast."

1 Thes. 1:4-5, *"We know, brothers loved by God, that you are chosen, and that our Good News came to you not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance."*

2 Tim. 1:9, *"[God] who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before times eternal."*

2 Tim. 2:10, *"Therefore I endure all things for the chosen ones' sake, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."*

Heb. 9:28, *"Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many."* (i.e. not all).

1 Pet. 2:9, *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."*

There are also plenty of biblical examples of God opening people's hearts to respond to his grace.

Ac. 16:14, *"A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one who worshiped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened to listen to the things which were spoken by Paul."*

Lk. 14:16-24, Parable of the great banquet which those originally called (the Jews) refused: vs. 23-24, *"The lord said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you that none of those men who were invited will taste of my supper.'"*

Ac. 13:46-48, *"Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: 'We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."* (NIV)

Ac. 28:23-28: Towards the end of the book of Acts Pauls states that the gospel shifted from the Jews to the Gentiles, and *"they will listen."*

9. Is there not a contradiction between God's clearly wanting all men to be saved and the fact that he only effectively calls some?

In other words, did God determine in advance to save some and reject others?

The idea that God determined in advance who he was going to save and who he was going to send to hell is called double predestination. Single predestination, or predestination for life, holds that God is active regarding the elect, but passive regarding the lost; he allows them to go their own way (see 9.1.c, 9.6, 11).

9.1. Classic Calvinism: irresistible (or monergistic) grace/double predestination

In Calvinism divine providence is the determining principle. Since people are "*dead in trespasses and sin*" (Eph. 2:1) they cannot of their own volition respond to the general call of the gospel. Thus no one will respond to God's call unless God first chooses to regenerate the person.

Jn. 6:37, "*All those whom the Father gives me will come to me. He who comes to me I will in no way throw out.*"

Jn. 6:44, "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day.*"

a. Interprets the word draw as compel

Holds that God "bends people's wills" so they will want to come to Christ, that he makes the elected sinner's ears to hear and eyes to see the gospel and respond to it. The reason for this stance is to prevent people from claiming that they can contribute anything at all toward their own salvation, including the act of receiving God's grace.

Though God moving people's wills to salvation does not necessarily require him to will every act, this position generally assumes that God is absolutely and meticulously behind every event that takes place in the universe (see discussion on Rom. 9:14-26 under 11:3).

"Since God's will is said to be the cause of all things, I have made his providence the determinative principle for all human plans and works." (Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.18.2 p. 232)

"God makes those whom he wills to be his sons; the intrinsic cause of this is in himself, for he is content with his own pleasure."
(Calvin, *Institutes* 3.22.7 p. 941)

b. Holds that the Holy Spirit has to regenerate a person before they can respond in repentance and faith

The Holy Spirit must first change people inwardly by regenerating them (causing them to be "born again") before they will respond positively.

This regenerated, born again, spirit will then cause the person to repent and believe (i.e. convert), which leads to justification, forgiveness, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

c. Holds to double predestination

In other words, it holds that God withholds his effectual working (irresistible grace) from the non-elect.

"God is said to have ordained from eternity those whom he wills to embrace in love and those upon whom he wills to vent his wrath." (*Institutes* 3.24.7, p. 985)

"God, to show forth his glory, withdraws the effectual working of his spirit from them (i.e. the reprobate)." (*Institutes* 3.24.2, p. 967)

This view is held by Calvin, Zwingli, Gomarus, Jonathan Edwards, John Piper, Loraine Boettner, R.C. Sproul, etc. We will look at this deeper in question #10.

9.2. The idea that God has two wills³⁸

Some posit the idea that God has two wills, his "ideal will", which is "what he would like for the world and for us human beings if human sinfulness were not a factor", and his "plan will" which "is not necessarily what he approves of, but is what he decides is actually going to happen. This "plan will" is the one which encompasses all things without exception: whatever happens is God's planned will.³⁹

Variants of the idea that God has two wills which may be at odds with each other have been around for a long time. William of Ockham (d. 1347) distinguished between God's *potentia absoluta* and his *potentia ordinata* (his potential, absolute, unrestricted power as opposed to the "ordered power") through which he actually works in the world. To him God could will things other than what he does; he could will evil.

Luther picked up on this. He taught the idea of *deus absconditus*, the hidden God who can act irrationally, unpredictably, in mysterious ways which

³⁸ The distinction made here is different from the concepts of God's permissive will and his efficient, or decretive will. In the former he desires a particular outcome but permits something less (as in the way God wants Christians to live the christian life and the way they often actually live it [see 1 Thes 4:3 5:18; Heb. 10:36; 1 Pet. 4:2, 1 Jn. 2:17, etc.]). In the latter he causes that which he desires to happen. For example, he willed creation and caused it to happen; he decreed that redemption would take place through his son, and that's how it happened (1 Pet. 1:20; Eph. 1:9). This distinction is generally accepted.

³⁹ See Orlando Saer. 2015. *Big God*. Scotland: Christian Focus.

supersede the way he has revealed himself in Christ. He held that there is a distinction between God as he reveals himself, and as he is in his infinite majesty. The hiddenness of God relates to how he has not revealed himself. Behind God's actual revelation stands the dark, hidden, utterly omnipotent God, the sole force behind all that takes place in history, irrespective of whether that is be conceived as good or evil. Everything, including the devil, is God's instrument. See *The Bondage of the Will*.

Calvinism makes a similar distinction between God's will of decree and God's will of command, also referred to as his secret will and his revealed will. Calvin himself, however, was very circumspect about the matter:

"Produce the passage, where I affirm that the will of God is very often contrary to the precept; for such a thing never came into my mind, even in a dream... the Scriptures assure me of the secret will of God; asserting what I have learned from them I do speak of an ascertained truth; but because I do not reach so great a height, I reverently adore with fear and trembling what is too sublime for the angels themselves. Often therefore in my writings I admonish my readers, that on this subject nothing is better than a learned ignorance... As the will of God, which he has delivered in his law, is good, I grant that whatever is contrary to it is evil."⁴⁰

The Calvinist scholar D.A. Carson notes that "this model is inadequate as a total explanation of the relation between the divine will and reality, because in too many instances the hidden will appears to make mockery of the revealed will"⁴¹. He too advises caution: "precisely how both operate in one sovereign God is extremely difficult to understand."⁴²

The problems are that if you follow that line of thought then there is either a conflict between God's love and his power, or his love is subordinated to power. It also begs the question as to whom/what the atonement was meant to satisfy; in fact, it undercuts the idea that penal substitutionary atonement had to be the way it was. And it means that, at a fundamental level, God remains unknowable--not in the sense that the human mind cannot grasp everything that can be known about God (a truism), but in the sense that mankind cannot really know the will of God when there are two which, at some level, appear to be at loggerheads.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. He is utterly trustworthy. He really is as he actually reveals himself to be. That which he loves, he loves

⁴⁰ Calvin. *On Secret Providence*, Article 7th. P. 65-66, 73

⁴¹ Carson, D.A., *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, p. 214.

⁴² Ibid

with his whole being, and that which he hates he also hates with his whole being. That is our security for all eternity.

9.3. Classical Arminianism: prevenient grace (also known as “evangelical synergism”).

a. Rejects Calvinist monergism

Rejects monergism because they believe it makes God the ultimate cause of sin and damnation, and thus ends up blaming God for those who are not saved. Why would God create beings whose every move he determines (like a child playing with toy soldiers, piano keys, or chess pieces on a board), and then punish them as if they were free agents living in rebellion against him? That, Arminians hold, is empty playacting, and is very insulting of God.

Classic Arminianism rejects the idea that everything is outside of one’s control, and that even if there are intermediate causes people themselves do not really really have the ability to initiate anything spiritually. That, they hold, leads to fatalism and is, as such, no different from Islam.

It interprets passages like Romans 9:14-26 as referring to Israel as a nation, not to individual salvation. In other words, Rom. 9 refers to classes of believers and unbelievers, not to individuals.

b. Interprets the word draw in John 6:44 as attract

Holds that the Calvinist definition of “compel” is false, as shown by Jn. 12:32, “*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*” Clearly, Christ did not, in fact, draw all people to himself. Draw must be interpreted as a “strong, insistent invitation”.

c. Interprets Eph. 1:11-12 as the choosing of a body, the church, not individual election (the pronouns are in the plural)

Eph. 1:11-12, “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.” (NIV)

d. Like Calvinism, it holds that God initiates restoring his relationship with man by enabling people to respond to him in repentance and faith

Grace comes first, and consists of God calling people to himself, convicting them of sin, opening their eyes to the nature of the gospel (illumination), and enabling them to personally believe.

However, it holds that prevenient grace is a grace which precedes regeneration which will lead to regeneration if not resisted. It does not hold that a person has to unilaterally exercise his/her will without divine enabling grace (that is the heresy of semi-pelagianism).

- e. It holds that God's prevenient grace can be resisted, and that this grieves God

Mat. 23:37, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!"

Luke 13:34, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."

Isa. 63:8-10, "He said, "Surely they are my people, children who will be true to me"; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them."

Acts 7:51, "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!"

Classical Arminianism holds that anyone who is positively inclined towards the gospel has already come under God's grace. Grace is the first cause which awakens the sinner. The question is whether a person can or cannot resist God's grace.

The classical Arminian holds that the awakened sinner can resist God's prevenient grace. In other words, God does not take away the free will in the sense that it cannot continue to do evil in its natural state.

"I ascribe to grace the commencement, the continuance and the consummation of all good—and to such an extent do I carry its influence, that a man, though already regenerate, can neither conceive, will not do any good at all, nor resist any evil temptation, without this preventing and exciting, this following and cooperating grace... The whole controversy reduces itself to the solution of this question, "Is the grace of God a certain irresistible force?" That is, the controversy does not relate to those actions or operations which may be ascribed to grace... but it relates solely to the mode of operation—whether it be irresistible or not. With respect to which, I believe, according to

the Holy Scripture, that many persons resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace that is offered." (Arminius, *The Works of Arminius*, Longman, Hurst, Green and Brown, London, p. 600)

In short, salvation is all of grace but this grace can be resisted. A gift that can be rejected is still a gift. A gift given under compulsion ceases to be a gift.

f. As such it holds to the divine self-limitation of God

"God limits himself not only by creating a world as such, but also ... by the kind of world he chose to create. That is, he chose to make a world that is relatively independent of him... That is, man is free to act without his acts having been predetermined by God... But not intervening in their decisions unless his special purposes require it, God respects both the integrity of the freedom he gave to humans beings and the integrity of his own sovereign choice to make free creatures in the first place."⁴³

This position is held by John Wesley, Roger Olson, William Klein, etc.

9.4. Semi-Pelagianism

The sinner has to exercise his will unilaterally, without divine help.

Considered a heresy by both Calvinists and Arminians. Also considered a heresy by the Roman Catholic church in theory, though in practice it has been taught by the church for centuries.

9.5. Illustrations

Imagine a number of people are lying wounded, broken, unconscious and utterly unable to help themselves at the bottom of a pit. They are, for all practical purposes, dead, because they are utterly helpless to do anything about their situation. The pit will fill with water, and when it does they are eternally done for.

- a. The Semi-Pelagian: God throws a ladder into the pit and shouts down for the unconscious people to climb up the ladder. They cannot do so. The pit fills with water, and they all drown.
- b. The Classical Calvinist: God recognizes that the people in the pit are unconscious and too broken to climb up any ladder he might throw down. So he lowers a ladder, climbs into the pit, chooses a number of people to save and does so. He leaves the rest behind. When the pit fills

⁴³ Jack Cottrell, "The Nature of Divine Sovereignty." *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), p. 106-107).

with water those left behind are drowned. The fact that God saves some is evidence of his sovereign grace.

- c. The Classical Arminian: God recognizes that the people in the pit are unconscious and too broken to climb up any ladder. So he climbs into the pit himself, revives the people to a state of consciousness and pleads with them to relax, to stop clinging to the bottom. He saves those who relax their grip on the bottom and entrust themselves to him. It takes a decision on the part of the revived person to relax, but no effort on his/her part to be saved. Once the pit fills with water those who refused to release themselves to the savior drown and are culpable for having rejected the salvation which came to them.

- d. Illustration from the Middle Ages

We open the shutters so the light of God's grace can stream in.

9.6. The whole question has become somewhat anachronistic

The Calvinist/ Arminian debate seeks to explain things in the context of time which actually belong to another dimension, i.e., eternity.

As noted earlier, the Calvinist/ Arminian controversy developed when time could not be conceived as anything but linear. It reflects a Newtonian view of the universe. However, time as a linear notion exists only in our three-dimensional universe. It is almost impossible for most of us to grasp anything other than three dimensional. However, time is a relative concept which exists only in a space/time universe which God transcends. Hence the *ordu salutis* is, from a divine perspective, not tenable for God, who lives in an eternal present. It is only an existential reality for human beings living in the space/time continuum.

D.A. Carson, a moderate Calvinist, lists 9 biblical reasons which affirm human freedom/responsibility and the reality of contingency:

- (1) people face a multitude of divine exhortations and commands,
- (2) people are said to obey, believe and choose God,
- (3) people sin and rebel against God,
- (4) people's sins are judged by God,
- (5) people are tested by God,
- (6) people received divine rewards,
- (7) the elect are responsible to respond to God's initiative,
- (8) prayers are not mere showpieces scripted by God, and
- (9) God literally pleads with sinners to repent and be saved.

Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension, pp. 18-22.

10. So, teacher, where do you personally stand?

Mine is the Calvinism of Spurgeon. Let me quote him from “*A Defense of Calvinism*”:⁴⁴

“If anyone should ask me what I mean by a Calvinist, I should reply, “He is one who says, Salvation is of the Lord.” I cannot find in Scripture any other doctrine than this. It is the essence of the Bible... Tell me anything contrary to this truth, and it will be a heresy; tell me a heresy, and I shall find its essence here, that it has departed from this great, this fundamental, this rock-truth, “God is my rock and my salvation.” ...

I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith, without works; nor unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel, unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and suffers the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus. Such a gospel I abhor.”

And so do I! Like Spurgeon, I hold that God is in total control of everything for the calling of the elect unto salvation, and that he is in total control of everything for their sanctification (think Rom. 8:28), and that he controls everything in the sense that such authority as Satan has over his own, i.e., those who are not in a covenant relationship with God, is limited by the parameters set by God in his common grace. And, lastly, I hold that when history comes to an end, everyone will glorify God—either by extolling his loving mercy or his righteous judgment. One day his kingdom will come and his will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Everything is moving towards that end.

At the same time we should not lose sight of the biblical teaching of the reality of evil as something outside of God, something his holy and righteous nature hates, is revolted by, and will judge. A fully monergic position would mean that in the final analysis the purpose of Christ’s work on the cross was to deal with divine internal conflictedness rather than the evil God hates and condemns, and which is diametrically opposed to and foreign to his righteous nature.

⁴⁴ Spurgeon, C.H., *A Defence of Calvinism*. Chapel Library, 2603 West Wright Street Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA. P. 8

We cannot run from the very strong NT statements about the scope given to Satan in the present, temporary reality, nor from the reality of spiritual warfare. This is the area of biblical teachings which I find the strong monergists often ignore or squeeze into a very tight mold to fit their theology (i.e., Satan as God's bulldog). This may be a reflection of what Paul Hiebert called the excluded middle of Western culture: we believe in the laws of nature (cause and effect) and in the philosophers' God (at best) but the idea of an intermediate spiritual realm is not taken seriously, except by those who have superstitious ideas about it.

Reformed theology holds no difficulties for me! I only balk when people try to push positions which either ignore or down-play the demonic, or which push logical conclusions to the degree in which they transgress the parameters of scriptures. And positing a God with a will which operates at two different levels strikes me as playing a cheap "get-out-of-jail" card.

Nothing can thwart God's purposes – yet God's hand is not in the evil, only in the good which comes out of it.

If you are standing in a pond of water up to your upper legs, a fish sees only your two legs operating in tandem as you stride along, with five toes on each foot. From within its universe (water) the fish cannot conceive how those parallel pillars are connected to one body, indeed, one head. Certain theological issues are like that. From within the dimension in which we live we cannot, for example, see how divine sovereignty and human responsibility cohere. They do, and we will learn how after we transcend the current dimensions of our existence.

Note that there is no logical inconsistency here, just a conundrum which we cannot, as yet, fully grasp. Within the natural world there are other conundrums which we cannot, as yet, grasp. Think, for instance, of light demonstrating the properties of both waves and particles at the same time.

11. Are there people whom God determined from eternity would go to hell?

This is known as the doctrine of reprobation.

11.1. People are condemned because of unbelief and their rejection of salvation

Jn. 5:39-40, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which testify about me. Yet you will not come to me, that you may have life."

11.2. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked

Ezek. 33:11, "Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways!'" (NIV)

Mat. 18:14, *“It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones (i.e., lost souls) should perish.”*

2 Pet. 3:9, *“The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”*

11.3. The main passage suggesting some are destined for hell is Rom. 9:17-22.

“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I caused you to be raised up, that I might show in you my power, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. You will say then to me, “Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?” But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?” Or hasn’t the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath made for destruction?”

The context of this passage is Paul’s assertion about the eternity of God’s election of Israel.

Vs. 18 expresses the fact that God has the right to reject those who refuse to accept his blessings on his terms, a right he exercised in the case of Pharaoh, whom he had raised up as absolute monarch but whose pride, stubbornness and rebellion made him the object of divine judgment.

Vs. 19 notes people’s natural aversion to God.

Vs. 20-21 respond by asking who we presume to be to think that we can accuse God of injustice for establishing the terms on which he will show mercy. Just because he allows those who, like Pharaoh, persist in their obstinacy to be hardened, does not mean that he is an arbitrary, capricious, or tyrannical being. As the lord and judge of all the earth he has clearly revealed the basis on which he will judge people: *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”* (Rom. 10: 13). He will show mercy to true believers and harden those who obstinately refuse his mercy.

Vs. 22 states that God endured sinners who should have been led to repentance, but who constantly rejected his overtures and so ended up

On the Day of Judgment no one will complain that God did not treat them fairly. The judge of all the earth will do right! (Gen. 18:25). Everyone will be judged according to his or her works, meaning there is a gradation of punishment. Those who are in Christ, however, are under no condemnation whatsoever.

becoming objects of his wrath. Thus even those who go to hell will end up glorifying aspects of God's character: notably his righteousness, holiness and divine hatred of sin.

12. How does God call people to himself?

12.1. Through the preaching of the gospel

2 Chron. 36:15, "Yahweh, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until Yahweh's wrath arose against his people, until there was no remedy."

Jer. 25:4-5, "Yahweh has sent to you all his servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them (but you have not listened, nor inclined your ear to hear) saying, Return now everyone from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings."

Rom. 10:14, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in him whom they have not heard? How will they hear without a preacher?"

2 Thes. 2:14, "He called you through our Good News, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Biblical illustrations:

Mat. 13:1-23: Parable of the sower.

Mat. 22:1-14: Parable of the wedding banquet with people offering excuses.

12.2. Through God's providential dealings in people's lives

Psalm 107:6, "They cried to Yahweh in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses."

Isa. 26:9, "When your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness."

Rom. 2:4, "Do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

12.3. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit

John 16:8-10, "When he [the Holy Spirit] has come, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment; about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to my Father, and you will not see me anymore."

13. What is meant by the term regeneration (or “new birth”)?

In theology the term regeneration refers to God giving new spiritual life where there was none before. It is an action of God in which he breathes spiritual life into a person. It is a secret work of God which is seen in its effects.

The Bible uses different words to describe the concept of regeneration: “born again”, “rebirth”, “new creation”.

Ti. 3:5, “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit (ESV).

The NIV uses “rebirth” in Ti. 3:5, *“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*

Jn. 1:12-13, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (NIV)

Jn. 3:3-8, “Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked... Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (NIV). Note that “must” in this passage is not a command but a statement of fact.

2 Cor. 5:17, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.”

Eph. 2:4-5, “But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”

Jam. 1:18, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.” (NIV)

1 Pet. 1:3, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (NIV)

14. Why do people need to be born again, or regenerated?

See Chapter 2 on sin and its effects.

14.1. The natural man is in a state of rebellion and alienated from God

Rom. 8:6-7, *"The mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace; because the mind of the flesh is hostile towards God; for it is not subject to God's law, neither indeed can it be."*

Col. 1:21, *"You, being in past times alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil deeds..."*

See also Eph. 2:12, 4:18.

14.2. The natural man is hopelessly enslaved/addicted to sin

1 Jn. 1:8, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."*

Jn. 8:34, *"Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin."*

Rom. 5:6-8, *"While we were yet weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man. Perhaps for a righteous person someone would even dare to die. But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

See also Rom. 3:1-23; Eph. 2:1-5.

14.3. The natural man is unable to change himself in ways acceptable to God

Jer. 13:23, *"Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil."* (NIV)

Gal. 3:21, *"Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could make alive, most certainly righteousness would have been of the law."*

14.4. The natural man is incapable of understanding the things of God

1 Cor. 2:14, *"Now the natural man does not receive the things of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned."*

He cannot understand because he has been blinded by Satan

1 Cor. 4:3-4, *"Even if our Good News is veiled, it is veiled in those who perish; in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Good News of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn on them."*

14.5. Natural religion is inadequate

Gal. 6:15, *"For in Christ Jesus neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."*

The picture of the bad tree: Mat. 7:19, *"Every tree that does not grow good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire."*

The first great principle of the new birth is that God does not avail himself of anything found in the natural man when he begets a Christian. Man is fallen and totally depraved from God's point of view. He is fallen in body, soul and spirit, and God does not begin to patch these up when he saves him. Instead of the old spirit, now dead, God implants a new spirit, having its source in himself. Instead of the old soul, God begins to construct a new soul so that the man comes to desire new things. Instead of the old body, which will one day die and decompose, God will eventually give a new body patterned after the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the Christian becomes a fresh beginning by God and can be called "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). **Boice**, *Expository Commentary on John*, p. 203

15. How are people regenerated, or "born again"?

This question is a great mystery. It all starts with the Spirit's work of regeneration. When that happens something mysterious takes place which involves all three persons of the Trinity.

15.1. All three persons of the Trinity play a role in regeneration

a. God the Holy Spirit is the author of regeneration

Jn. 3:8, *"The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

b. God the Father is the author of regeneration

Jn. 1:13, *"...children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."* (NIV)

Ac. 16:14, *"A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one who worshiped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened to listen to the things which were spoken by Paul."*

Eph. 2:4-5, *"But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."*

Col. 2:13, *"You were dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh. He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses."*

Jam. 1:17-18, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, nor turning shadow. Of his own will he gave birth to us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

1 Pet. 1:3, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (NIV)

c. The Son is the author of regeneration

Jn. 5:21, "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he desires."

15.2. By wholeheartedly believing in and choosing for Christ

Jn. 1:12-13, "But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God's children, to those who believe in his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Jn. 7:37-38, "Now on the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, from within him will flow rivers of living water.'"

Jn. 8:31, "Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, 'If you remain in my word (i.e., if you hold to my teachings), then you are truly my disciples.'"

Jesus' statement, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (John 3:14) is in answer to Nicodemus' question on how people can be born again.

15.3. The Biblical gospel is God's instrument used to effect regeneration

Jn. 5:24, "Most certainly I tell you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

Jam. 1:18, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." (NIV)

1 Pet. 1:23, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." (NIV)

It is said that George Whitefield preached over 300 times on the text, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God." Someone asked him why he preached so often on that text. He replied, "Because you must be born again."

16. What are the results of regeneration?

Regeneration is a “re-genesis”, a recreation by God in terms of spiritual life.

16.1. Regeneration fulfils the OT prophecies about the gift of a “new heart”

Ezek. 36:26-27, “I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my ordinances, and do them.”

Jer. 31:31-33, “Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Yahweh. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

16.2. The regenerated person receives new spiritual life which responds radically differently to God from the way the old self did

Jn. 1:12-13, “But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God’s children, to those who believe in his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Eph. 2:4-5, “But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”

Col. 3:1-2, “If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth.”

Tit. 3:5, “He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”

1 Jn. 3:14, “He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”

1 Jn. 5:1, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. Whoever loves the Father also loves the child who is born of him.”

1 Jn. 5:4-5, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

16.3. The regenerated person is joined in faith to Christ

Christ's life is lived in believers; they are "united with Christ" by faith, which enables them to live life in ways they could not have imagined. The Bible also refers to this as "partaking of the divine nature".

Jn. 15:5, *"I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."*

Gal. 2:20, *"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me. That life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."*

2 Pet. 1:4, *"He [God] has granted to us his precious and exceedingly great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust."*

This will be further unpacked when we get to sanctification.

Dallas Willard's illustration of the nature of the rebirth

Think of a cabbage: it interacts with the soil, water and sun. But it cannot interact with a ball of wool. Now think of a kitten. Unlike the cabbage, it can interact and play happily with a ball of wool. It lives at a higher level of interaction with its surroundings than a cabbage. However, the kitten cannot interact with poetry or math. Normal people can. You have a higher capacity for interaction with your surroundings than kittens do.

At creation God created people with the greatest ability of all, the ability to interact with Him. At the fall they lost that ability. But when they come to Christ in repentance and faith then they are born again: their ability to interact with God is restored. It is regenerated again. *Hearing God*, p. 141. Fount, London 1989.

17. **How can sinners appropriate God's grace in Christ for themselves?**

Through repentance and faith: repentance from sin, and a turning in faith to Christ, believing and accepting that his atoning work was for sufficient for you. This is called conversion.

Mk. 1:15, *"Repent, and believe in the Good News."*

Ac. 20:21, *"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."* (NIV)

18. **What is repentance?**

This is the missing element in most contemporary gospel presentations. This is probably because there seems to be no awareness of sin as an offense to a holy

God—no awareness of divine holiness—and thus no sense of impending divine wrath.

18.1. What repentance is not

a. It is not merely feeling sorry or remorse for doing wrong

Worldly sorrow is sorrow for the consequences of one's actions, not for the sin itself.

2 Cor. 7:9-10, "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that you were made sorry to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly way, that you might suffer loss by us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, which brings no regret. But the sorrow of the world produces death."

Mat. 27:3-4, "Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that Jesus was condemned, felt remorse, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood'."

Heb. 12:17, "For you know that even when he (i.e. Esau) afterward desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for a change of mind though he sought it diligently with tears."

b. It is not mere conviction of sin

Conviction is a work of the Holy Spirit and precedes repentance, but not everyone whom the Spirit convicts of sin repents.

Gen. 6:3, "Yahweh said, "My Spirit will not strive with man forever."

c. It is not a bad conscience

Mk. 6:26, "The king was exceedingly sorry, but for the sake of his oaths, and of his dinner guests, he did not wish to refuse her..." (and went ahead and decapitated John the Baptist anyway).

Ac. 24:25, "As he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified, and answered, "Go your way for this time, and when it is convenient for me, I will summon you."

d. It is not the reformation of one's life, the turning over a new leaf

Isa. 64:6, "For we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is like a polluted garment."

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian 'conception' of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins... In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God...

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything they say, and so everything can remain as it was before... Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 45-49.

18.2. What repentance is

- a. It involves acknowledging (confessing) that my wrongdoings are an offence against the personal, holy God of the Bible

It involves the recognition that my sins are more than just social failings, but that they are an offence to God.

Psa. 32:5, "I acknowledged my sin to you. I did not hide my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to Yahweh, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."

1 Jn. 1:8-9, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Ac. 20:21, Paul defending his ministry: "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." (NIV)

- b. It involves a deliberate turning away from a particular way of thinking

2 Tim. 2:25, "Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth." (NIV)

Rev. 9:20, "The rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they wouldn't worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood; which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk."

c. It involves deliberate, wilful turning away from a particular way of life

Luke 3:8, *"Produce fruits worthy of repentance."*

Acts 11:21, *"The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord."*

Acts 26:20, Paul defending himself before King Agrippa, *"First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds."* (NIV)

Rev. 2:21-22, re. the church of Thyatira: *"I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great oppression, unless they repent of her works."*

18.3. Repentance is necessary before sin can be forgiven

Lk. 3:3, John the Baptist preached *"the baptism of repentance for remission of sins."*

Lk. 24:47, *"Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations."*

Ac. 3:19, Peter addressing onlookers after healing the cripple at the temple: *"Repent therefore... that your sins may be blotted out..."*

Ac. 5:31, The apostles after being told by the Jewish leaders not to preach about Jesus stated that: *"God exalted him (Jesus) with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins."*

Repentance involves the whole person:

- The mind: I acknowledge that I have been wrong
- The emotions: I am deeply sorry for offending a loving and holy God
- The will: I shall turn away from my sins and turn to God.

Ezek. 18: 30-32, *"Therefore I will judge you, house of Israel, everyone according to his ways, says the Lord Yahweh. Return, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, in which you have transgressed; and make yourself a new heart and a new spirit: for why will you die, house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies, says the Lord Yahweh: therefore turn yourselves, and live."*

18.4. Old Testament examples of repentance

a. Personal repentance

2 Chron. 33:12; King Manassah: *"When he was in distress, he begged Yahweh his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers."*

Job 42:6, *"Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."*

Psa. 32:5, *"I acknowledged my sin to you. I did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Yahweh.' And you forgave the iniquity of my sin."*

Psa. 51:1-4, *"Have mercy on me, God, according to your loving kindness; according to the multitude of your tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions. My sin is constantly before me. Against you, and you only, have I sinned and done that which is evil in your sight."*

b. National repentance

1 Kin. 8:47-50, Solomon's prayer of dedication, *"If they repent in the land where they are carried captive, and turn again, and make supplication to you in the land of those who carried them captive, saying, 'We have sinned, and have done perversely; we have dealt wickedly;' if they return to you with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city which you have chosen, and the house which I have built for your name; then hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven, your dwelling place, and maintain their cause; and forgive your people who have sinned against you."*

Jon. 3:10, re. Nineveh, *"God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster which he said he would do to them, and he did not do it."*

Zech. 1:6, *"But my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did not they overtake your fathers? "Then they repented and said, 'Just as Yahweh of Armies determined to do to us, according to our ways, and according to our practices, so he has dealt with us.'"*

c. Refusal to repent

Jer. 5:3, *"O Yahweh, do not your eyes look on truth? You have stricken them, but they were not grieved. You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock. They have refused to return."*

18.5. NT on repentance

a. John the Baptist, Jesus and the disciples all preached a gospel of repentance

Mat. 3:1, 5-6, *"In those days, John the Baptizer came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" ... Then people from Jerusalem, all of Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him. They were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins."*

Mat. 4:17, *"Jesus began to preach, and to say, 'Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand'."*

Mk. 6:12, *"They (i.e., the disciples) went out and preached that people should repent."*

Luke places a particularly strong emphasis on Jesus calling people to repentance. See Lk. 5:32; 10:13; 11:32; 13:1-7; 15:7-10; 16:30; 17:3-4; 24:47.

b. The epistles on repentance

Note that the call to repentance here is to both believers and non-believers.

Rom. 2:4, *"do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"*

2 Cor. 7:9-10, *"I now rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that you were made sorry to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly way, that you might suffer loss by us in nothing. ¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, which brings no regret. But the sorrow of the world produces death."*

2 Cor. 12:21, *"I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged." (NIV)*

2 Tim. 2:25, *"Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth" (NIV)*

2 Pet. 3:9, *"The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

Repentance and faith are the elementary teachings of the gospel:

Heb. 6:1, *"Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God." (NIV)*

c. Revelation on repentance

The call to repentance in the letters to the seven churches.

To the church in Ephesus: Rev. 2:5, *"Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I am coming to*

you swiftly, and will move your lamp stand out of its place, unless you repent."

To the church at Pergamum: Rev. 2:16, *"Repent therefore, or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth."*

To the church in Thyatira: Rev. 2:22, *"I will make those who commit adultery with her (Jezebel) suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways."* (NIV)

To the church in Sardis: Rev. 3:3, *"Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent."* (NIV)

To the church in Laodicea: Rev. 3:19, *"As many as I love, I reprove and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent."*

Note the refusal to repent during the end times, no matter how dire things get:

Rev. 9:20-21, *"The rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they wouldn't worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood; which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk. They did not repent of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their sexual immorality, nor of their thefts."*

Rev. 16:9-11, *"People were scorched with great heat, and people blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory. The fifth poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was darkened. They gnawed their tongues because of the pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores. They did not repent of their works."*

19. What is true faith, i.e. a faith that works in terms of securing God's blessings in Christ?

In other words, how can sinners receive God's declaration of "has been justified" based on Christ's atoning work?

19.1. Translation of the word "faith"

In English Bibles, one word-family in NT Greek is translated by two entirely different English word families. The NIV uses three. This is confusing but necessary because no English word family includes all the aspects of the Greek.

It is very important to know this so that you can recognise related words which do not look related in the English versions. When you read the Bible in other languages, you also need to notice if your translation contains the same kind of problem.

Greek	English	References
<i>pistis</i> , [noun]	faith, belief, trust.	Rom. 1:17; 5:1-2; 10:6; 2 Thes. 2:13
<i>pisteuo</i> [verb]	to believe, to have faith, to put faith in, to trust.	John 14:1, 10-12; Rom. 10:4, 10.
<i>pistos</i> [adjective]	faithful, trustworthy.	1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Tim. 2:11.

Heb. 11:1, *“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* (NASB & ESV & RSV)

“Trusting is being confident of what we hope for, convinced about things we do not see.” (Complete Jewish Bible)

“Now faith means putting our full confidence in the things we hope for, it means being certain of things we cannot see.” J.B. Philips

“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” (NIV)

19.2. Faith that doesn't save, that is ineffective

God has prepared a way for sinners to be justified. But how do we actually receive justification? There are all kinds of false or insufficient ideas about how be declared righteous by God.

a. Faith in good works

Rom. 3:10, *“There is no-one righteous, no, not one.”*

b. Faith in obeying the Law

Rom. 3:20, *“By the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight. For through the law comes the knowledge of sin.”*

c. Faith without reason: the irrational “leap in the dark”.

Existentialism as taught by Soren Kierkegaard: *“When someone is to leap he must certainly do it alone and also be alone in properly understanding that it is an impossibility... the leap is the decision... I require a resolution. And in that I am right, for only in that way can reflection be stopped.”* *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments.*

However, the Christian faith is based on certain perfectly rational presuppositions. You cannot become a Christian only by reason, but the doctrines of Christianity are reasonable.

Acts 17:17, "*He (i.e. Paul) reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who met him.*"

The secular version of existentialism, which holds that an "authentic life" is lived according to a sense of meaning the individual creates for him or herself, has had a huge influence on western culture. The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre popularized the notion, and such novelists and writers as Norman Mailer, Philip Roth, John Updike, J.D. Salinger, Kurt Vonnegut, Jack London, Jack Kerouac, etc. popularized it.

d. Belief in false "facts"

Sincere faith in a false saviour will not lead you to heaven. You can drive 100 km carefully and safely but if you are following the wrong road you will not reach your destination. Likewise you can have a sincere religious faith, but if it is not faith in the one Saviour Jesus Christ, that faith is not saving faith.

e. A mental assent to certain theologically true facts

I can believe true things about God and about Jesus Christ and still not have trusted him as my own Saviour. This is the kind of faith devils have.

Jam. 2:19, "*You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe, and shudder.*"

f. Belief in one's self

Common today, when people are encouraged to believe in their own abilities, or in the "powers of their own soul". It is a form of self-salvation: "I believe in me"; "you've got to believe in yourself".

g. Faith as the imitation of those around you

Heb. 11:29, "*By faith, they passed through the Red Sea as on dry land. When the Egyptians tried to do so, they were swallowed up.*"

h. Faith without repentance

Believing that the Gospel is true but not acting upon it. Jesus warns strongly about this at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 7:21-27), and this is what James is concerned about when he says that "*faith without works is dead*" [Jam. 2:14-26].

Roman Catholic theology holds that “justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man” (Council of Trent (1547: DS1529). This confuses justification with sanctification and regeneration.

19.3. The nature of saving faith

Faith in Christ is the means whereby righteousness is received and justification bestowed. Sinners are justified ‘by’ or ‘through’ faith (Greek *dia pistei* or *ek pisteos*).

Romans 3:22-22, *“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”* (NIV)

The difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism is that for the former justification is a declaration and for the latter it is a transformation. Protestants insist on justification by faith alone – justification as a legal pronouncement, declaring the sinner not guilty. It does not make you righteous; it declares you righteous. Regeneration and sanctification are related but separate works of God.

Note the distinctions:

Regeneration is an act of God in us.	Justification is a pronouncement of God about us.
Justification happens once.	Sanctification is a lifelong process.
Justification removes the guilt of sin immediately.	Sanctification removes the pollution of sin gradually.

a. Saving faith is a gift of God

Eph. 2:8-9, *“By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.”*

b. Saving faith is received by acting on the word of God.

Ac. 6:7, *“The word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly.”*

Rom. 10:17, *“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

Col. 1:23, "Continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Good News which you heard, which is being proclaimed in all creation under heaven; of which I, Paul, was made a servant."

Col. 2:7, "As therefore you received Christ Jesus, the Lord, walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, even as you were taught ..."

The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 not only received a word from God, they also acted on it. They "contended" for it.

Jude 3, "I was constrained to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

- c. Saving faith has an intellectual aspect: it holds certain doctrines to be true

Psa. 9:10, "Those who know your name will put their trust in you."

Rom. 10:17, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Heb. 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to him, for he who comes to God must believe that he exists, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him."

- d. Saving faith has a volitional aspect: it leads to a lifetime of obedience

Heb. 12:1-2, "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith." (NIV)

It recognizes Christ's lordship over your life. Paul expresses this as "the obedience that comes from faith" (Rom. 1:5). In other words, saving faith is not just believing but *believing in and totally entrusting one's self to*.

Acts 16:31, "They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

19.4. Other images for saving faith

- a. Jesus referred to it as "coming to him"

Mat. 11:28-30, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jn. 7:37, "On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink!"

Jn Jn. 6:35 Jesus parallels “comes to” with “believes in”. “Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

b. Jesus used the image of “looking to him”

Jn. 6:40, “This is the will of the one who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son, and believes in him, should have eternal life.”

Jn. 3:14-15, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

c. John refers to it as “receiving Jesus”

Jn. 1:12, “As many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God’s children, to those who believe in his name.”

FAITH: Forsaking All I Trust Him

Louis Berkhof describes saving faith as “A positive conviction ... of the truth of the Gospel and a hearty reliance on the promises of God in Christ.”

Berkhof, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, p. 123.

20. What does “living by faith” mean?

Living by faith is not just believing in, it is trusting ongoingly in, to the exclusion of trusting in anyone/anything else. In other words, living by faith and submission are, essentially, the same thing. The person who has saving faith will live out the rest of their life by faith, trusting in the Saviour in all circumstances.

Psa. 44:6, 8, “I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me... In God we have made our boast all day long, we will give thanks to your name forever.”

Prov. 3:5-6, “Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

The writer to the Hebrews gives examples of the faith of OT characters (Heb. 11). Paul makes detailed references to the faith of Abraham (Rom. 4 and Gal. 3).

We will be unpacking the nature of ongoing faith more under sanctification

21. How can I be sure I am among the elect?

By trusting wholeheartedly in Jesus for salvation and seeking to live a life of obedience and discipleship to him. This “growth in grace” is evidence of the new birth/regeneration.

Phil. 2:12-13, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure."

2 Pet. 1:10, "Therefore, brothers, be more diligent to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never stumble."

22. What is meant by justification?

As with faith, so with justification, one word-family in NT Greek is translated by different English word families. This is confusing but necessary because no one English word includes all the aspects of the Greek word family.

The basic meaning of both justification and righteousness in the Bible derives from the Hebrew *sedeq*, which was usually translated in the Greek Septuagint as *dikaiosune*. Thus the words right, righteous, righteousness and just, justice, justify and justification belong together linguistically and theologically. However, these words do not denote the abstract idea of justice or virtue as much as right standing and consequent right behaviour within a community.

Greek	English	References
<i>Dikaiosune</i> [noun]	Righteousness Justification Justice	Rom. 6:13 Rom. 10:4 Acts 17:31
<i>Dikaiow</i> [verb]	Justify, declare righteous Vindicate	Rom. 3:24, 26, 30 Mat. 11:19
<i>Dikaios</i> [adjective]	Righteous Justified Just, fair	Mat. 5:45; Rom. 3:10 Rom. 2:13; 5:19 Rom. 3:26; 1 John 1:9

When you see these words you must decide on its meaning according to the context. If a noun, does it refer to *the moral quality* of being righteous (opposite: unrighteousness), or *the legal status* of being declared not guilty (opposite: condemnation)? If an adjective, does it refer to *a moral quality* (this person is righteous or fair), or to *a legal declaration* (this person is not guilty).

Justification is the opposite of condemnation (declaring guilty). It is an acquittal, a declaration of "not guilty". Notice the word "declares" in definitions below. Justification does not make a person righteous. It is simply a declaration or pronouncement respecting the relation of the person to the law.

"Justification is that legal act of God by which he declares the sinner righteous on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ." Berkhof 1960, 128.

"Justification is an act of God whereby he declares unjust sinners to be just after he has imputed to them the righteousness of Christ." Sproul 1992, 190.

In the following verses it is obvious that justify can only mean to declare righteous, and not to make righteous.

Rom. 4:5, *"But to him who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness."*

Rom. 5:16b, 18, *"The judgment came by one to condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses to justification... So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life."*

Rom. 8:33-34, *"Who could bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."*

*"When God justifies sinners, he is not declaring bad people to be good, or saying that they are not sinners after all; he is pronouncing them legally righteous, free from any liability to the broken law, because he himself in his Son has borne the penalty of their law-breaking." John Stott, 1986, *The Cross of Christ*, 190.*

23. So does our faith earn justification? Is it another form of religious good works or obedience?

What is meant by the statement *"the work of God is to believe?"* (Jn. 6:29). What are the implications of Jesus's statement to the sinful woman in Lk. 7:50, *"Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'"*

"Faith's only function is to receive what grace freely offers" (Stott 1986, 190).

"Scripture never says that we are justified because of the inherent goodness of our faith, as if our faith has merit before God. It never allows us to think that our faith in itself earns favour with God" (Grudem, page 730).

Scripture says that we are justified 'by means of' our faith, understanding faith to be the instrument through which justification is given to us, but not as an activity that earns us merit or favour with God. Rather, we are justified solely because of the merits of Christ's work.

Rom. 5:17-19, *"For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous."*

24. What are the results of justification?

24.1. Remission of the penalty of sin

Remission = the cancellation of a penalty. It is illustrated by Barabbas, the guilty criminal awaiting death, who was set free because Jesus died in his place at the feast of Passover (Luke 23:17-26).

Isa. 53:5-6, "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all... Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities." (NIV)

Jn. 1:29, "The next day, he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Jn. 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Rom. 5:6-8, "For while we were yet weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man. Yet perhaps for a righteous person someone would even dare to die. But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

2 Cor. 5:21, "For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Col. 2:13-14, "You were dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh. He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, wiping out the handwriting in ordinances which was against us; and he has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross."

1 Jn. 2:12, "I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake."

24.2. The imputation of Christ's righteousness

Impute = to charge to someone's account. It is the act in which God reckons Jesus' righteousness to our account.

Phil. 3:8-9, "I count all things to be a loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and count them nothing but refuse, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."

Rom. 5:18-19, *"So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous."*

1 Cor. 1:30, *"Because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."*

2 Cor. 5:21, *"For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

24.3. A position of right standing

A criminal whose punishment has been cancelled (like Barabbas) is still not considered righteous. The president can pardon people, but he cannot wipe their slates clean. They remain criminals.

Justification, on the other hand, clears the record. It involves a change in position: those justified are not considered sinners anymore, for Christ's righteousness has been imputed to them.

Rom. 8:3-4, *"For what the law couldn't do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh; that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."*

Now they are given a position of right standing with God the Father, restored to favour and fellowship with Him. They are, in fact, adopted as his children.

25. **What is the doctrine of adoption all about?**

25.1. Created beings being called "sons of God" is not uncommon in the Bible

- a. Angels were called "sons of God" simply by virtue of their being created beings. (Job 2:1, 1 Tim. 5:21).
- b. Adam was also called a son of God by virtue of being a created being (Luke 3:38; Psalm 8:1-4)
- c. Israel was collectively called God's son, or firstborn by virtue of God graciously electing, redeeming and adopting them from among all the other ethnic groups on the earth

Ex. 4:22-23, *"You shall tell Pharaoh, 'Yahweh says, Israel is my son, my firstborn, and I have said to you, 'Let my son go, that he may serve me'; and you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn."*

Hos. 11:1, *“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.”*

Rom. 9:3-4, *“For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brothers’ sake, my relatives according to the flesh, who are Israelites; whose is the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service, and the promises.”*

- d. Israel’s kings were sometimes referred to as “sons of God” by virtue of their being God’s vassal rulers. This also reflected a common ancient idea that a nation’s rulers were able to relate uniquely to the “the gods” (Psalm 2:6-7, 1 Chron. 28:6).

25.2. Paul’s use of the term adoption

Paul used the term adoption and the phrase “sons of God” to refer to the rights and privileges of sonship/ daughtership of those who are “born” into God’s family.

In this sense adopted reflects the nature of the believers’ ongoing relationship, position and privileges with God as a result of the new legal status that comes with being born again to newness of life.

This is what we are predestined for!

a. Three-fold aspect of Paul’s understanding of the believer’s adoption

i. Adopted from eternity for the purpose of holiness

Eph. 1:4-5, *“He (God) chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without defect before him in love; having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire.”*

ii. Adopted at the moment of conversion

Jn. 1:12-13, *“But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God’s children, to those who believe in his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

Rom. 8:15-17, *“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father! The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him.”*

Gal. 3:26, *“For you are all children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus.”*

Gal. 4:4-7, *“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent out his Son, born to a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of children. And because you are children, God sent out the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!” So you are no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”*

iii. Adopted in the future

Believers will receive the fullness of all that is theirs in Christ at his second coming. This full manifestation includes the renewal of the body and, it appears, of all of creation as well; creation is awaiting the day when the “sons of God” will be revealed.

Rom. 8:23, *“Not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body.”*

Phil. 3:20-21, *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself.”*

Rev. 21:7, *“He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son.”*

b. The implications (rights and privileges) of adoption into God’s family

i. We receive the “family name”

Adoption implies a total change of allegiance.

1 Jn. 3:1, *“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”*

Rev. 3:12, *“I (Jesus) will also write on them my new name.”*

A story is told of the German Kaiser who refused to see a delegation of German-Americans. “People were either one or the other, he declared. They could not be a mixture! In the same way, being adopted by God must involve a total change of allegiance...

ii. We receive the “family nature” (i.e., God’s DNA as it were!)

Jn. 1:12-13, *“But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God’s children, to those who believe in his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

Jn. 3:6, *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."*

iii. As adopted children we have direct access to God, our heavenly the Father

Rom. 8:15, *"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"*

iv. As adopted children we are loved and comforted as family members

Jn. 16:27, *"The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came from God."*

2 Cor. 1:3-4, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."*

v. We are to love and comfort the other family members

2 Cor. 1:3-4, see above

1 Jn. 2:9-11, *"He who says he is in the light and hates his brother, is in the darkness even until now. He who loves his brother remains in the light, and there is no occasion for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness, and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."*

1 Jn. 3:14, *"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. He who does not love his brother remains in death."*

1 Jn. 4:7-8, *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."*

1 Jn. 5:1, *"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. Whoever loves the Father also loves the child who is born of him."*

vi. We are disciplined as family members

Heb. 12:5-11, *"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what*

children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined – and everyone undergoes discipline – then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (NIV)

vii. We will receive the inheritance as children of the family

Gal. 4:7, “*you are no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*”

1 Pet. 1:3-4, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy became our father again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance that does not fade away, reserved in Heaven for you.*”

Rom. 8:17, “*Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*” (NIV)

c. Adoption assumes growth and maturing

It assumes that the children will want to develop in their Christian life from “new-born babes” to someone who is fully mature as a son so that they can play their role in the family.

Greek has various words to describe the stages of growth and development:

i. Generic word for children (*teknon*): all born again believers.

Jn. 1:12-13, “*But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God’s children, to those who believe in his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*”

See also Rom. 8:16-17, 21; Phil. 2:15; 1 Jn. 3:1-2, 10.

ii. Newly born babies (*brephos*): new believers

1 Pet. 2:2, “*As newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, that with it you may grow.*”

iii. Infant (*nepios, pais, paidion*): immature believers

1 Cor. 3:1, "Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly – mere infants (*nepios*) in Christ." (NIV)

1 Cor. 13:11, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away childish things."

1 Cor. 14:20, "Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants (*paidion*), but in your thinking be adults." (NIV)

Gal. 4:3, "also, when we were underage (*nepios*), we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world." (NIV)

Eph. 4:14, "Then we will no longer be infants (*nepios*), tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming."

iv. School-going children (*paidarion*)

Stage at which the child needs instructions, teaching, nurturing and disciplining.

Mat. 11:16-17, "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call to their companions and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance. We mourned for you, and you did not lament.'"

v. Youth in the prime of life (*neaniskos*)

1 Jn. 2:13-14, "I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one... I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one." (NIV)

vi. Mature, fully grown children of character and privilege (*huios*)

This is the word God used of Christ at his baptism (Mat. 3:17; see also Rom. 1:4), and this is what God wants us to become.

2 Cor. 6:17-18, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters." (NIV)

Gal. 1:15-16, "But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles."

Gal. 4:6, "And because you are children, God sent out the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!"

The world is waiting in anticipation for the manifestation of mature children of God.

Rom. 8:19, "For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed."

This spiritual growth and maturing which takes place in the life of God's adopted children takes us to the subject of sanctification.

26. What is Sanctification?

Sanctification refers to growth in holiness and victory over sin. Regeneration and justification happen once and for all in a moment. Conversion happens once and for all – either in a moment or within a recognisable period of time. Sanctification, however, is progressive. It is a gradual process which continues all our lives.

26.1. Meaning of sanctification

Sanctification originally referred to setting someone (or something in the OT) apart for a particular purpose.

The Hebrew word translated as sanctified, *qadesh*, means to be, make or pronounce ceremonially or morally clean. It is also translated as consecrated and holy.

The NT Greek word *hagiasmos* and its derivatives is more active: it means to purify, to make holy, to hallow, to sanctify. It refers to God setting believers apart from evil and using them for his purpose and in his service.

1 Thes. 4:3, 7, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified... For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life." (NIV)

"Sanctification is a progressive work of God in man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives." **Grudem** 1994, 746.

26.2. The importance of sanctification

God's great concern for us is not our happiness but our holiness. The whole purpose of redemption is transformation! Happiness is a by-product of holiness.

Growth in sanctification is important because it will make us increasingly effective in ministry. How often are we really no different from the world in the way we go about our business? Does the world look at us, see something

radically different and... marvel? In fact, one of the worst things a mission agency can do is send out immature believers whose lives undermine the reality that the gospel is transformative.

2 Pet. 1:5-8, "Yes, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence; and in moral excellence, knowledge; and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control patience; and in patience godliness; and in godliness brotherly affection; and in brotherly affection, love. For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

26.3. False Approaches to Sanctification

a. Asceticism

Asceticism is not to be confused with the very important biblical teaching of the mortification of the flesh, nor with such spiritual disciplines as fasting, extensive prayer, etc.

Asceticism holds that the flesh *as matter* is evil, and that this sinful disposition of the body can be subdued by ascetic practices such as rigorous self-discipline and self-denial.

It draws from a wrong interpretation of verses such as these:

Mat. 5:29-30, "If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna. If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna."

Rom. 8:13, "For if you live after the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Col. 3:5, "Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth: sexual immorality, uncleanness, depraved passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

In the same book of Colossians, however, Paul warns against asceticism.

Col. 2:20-23, "Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence." (NIV)

b. Legalism

Holds that by carefully following God's laws and regulations believers will grow in holiness.

Legalism is a doctrine of sanctification which is based on good works rather than that which flows out of a transformed nature. Paul teaches extensively in Romans and Galatians on the inability of the law to save or sanctify.

Rom. 7:5, *"When we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were through the law, worked in our members to bring out fruit to death."*

Gal. 3:3, *"Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now completed in the flesh?"*

c. Antinomianism

The opposite of legalism. Antinomianism means "against the law." It holds that there are no moral laws which God expects Christians to obey anymore. It takes the biblical teaching that Christians are not required to observe the OT law as a means of salvation to the unbiblical conclusion that there is no longer a moral law which God expects Christians to obey. Hyper dispensationalism is a type of antinomianism. (See Appendix 2)

i. Jesus' answer

Mat. 5:18-20, *"I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter^a or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished. Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."*

ii. Paul's answer

Rom. 6:1-2, *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? May it never be! We who died to sin, how could we live in it any longer?"*

Rom. 12:1-2, *"Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God."*

iii. John's answer

1 Jn. 2:3-6, *"This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commandments. One who says, "I know him," and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, God's love has most certainly been perfected in him. This is how we know that we are in him: he who says he remains in him ought himself also to walk just like he walked."*

1 Jn. 5:3, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. His commandments are not grievous."*

iv. James' answer

See Jam. 2:14-26

d. Sinless perfection

This idea, also known as entire sanctification, is not uncommon in certain Wesleyan (Methodist) circles. It holds that the eradication of sin (defined as perfect purity of intention or motivation, not necessarily the eradication of mistakes and errors of judgment) in the life of believers is possible in this life. This is not borne out by the Scriptures (see chapter X, Hamartiology).

1 Jn. 1:8, *"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us".*

A soldier radioed his commanding officer telling him that he'd taken a POW. "Bring him in," the officer commanded. "Can't, the POW won't come," was the answer. "Then come yourself," the officer commanded. "Can't, the POW won't let me," came the answer.

In the same way Christians are supposed to be victorious over sin but, in reality, often remain in bondage to it. We claim to be "set free in Christ" but sin continues to have dominion over us...

26.4. Biblical teaching on sanctification

a. Sanctification started at the time of our regeneration

1 Cor. 6:11, *"And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."* (NIV)

Sanctification is something that happened to us at regeneration which has a lasting effect because of our new position of being "in Christ". Thus the believer's new identity in Christ is their starting point:

Rom. 6:11, *"Thus consider yourselves also to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

2 Cor. 5:17, *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new."*

b. Sanctification continues throughout our lives

In this sense it is progressive or experiential. Every NT epistle exhorts believers to live a separate, sanctified life in Christ.

Rom. 6:12-13, *"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. Also, do not present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."*

See also Rom. 7:14-25.

2 Cor. 3:18, *"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."* (NIV)

Col. 3:10, *"Put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of his Creator."*

1 Thes. 5:23, *"May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Heb. 10:14, *"For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."*

Much teaching in the NT letters urges the moral development of Christians. The word that frequently introduces such teaching is *Therefore*. Here are a few examples from Romans and 1 Corinthians.

Rom. 6:12, *"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts."*

Rom. 12:1, *"Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service."*

1 Cor. 6:12, *"You were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."*

1 Cor. 10:14, *"Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."*

1 Cor. 15:58, *"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*

c. Sanctification will be completed only at death or at Christ's second coming

We can appear to be doing well in terms of our growth in grace until our life's circumstances change. The new pressures suddenly bring aspects of our sinful nature to the surface which need purging.

We will never stop longing for completeness until we are made complete by the Lord at his second coming. That is when sin will be eradicated root and branch, and believers will receive a glorified body.

1 Cor. 15:49, 54, *"As we have borne the image of those made of dust, let us also bear the image of the heavenly... when this perishable body will have become imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then what is written will happen: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

Phil. 3:20-21, *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself."*

26.5. Sanctification is a joint effort of God and man.

Sanctification requires our active and willing co-operation with the work of God in us.

Phil. 2:12-13, *"So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure."*

a. God's role

1 Thes. 5:23, *"May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

i. God the Father provides us with all the "power tools" we need to become more like his son

Note the emphasis on God's power in Eph. 3:14-20, *"I pray that he [God] may strengthen you with power.... That you may have power to grasp how wide and long and deep is the love of Christ... Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus."* (NIV)

Heb. 13:20-21, *"Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant, our Lord Jesus, make you complete in every good work to do*

his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

God is the source of power. The most powerful thing he has done for the sanctification of individual believers is to regenerate them. The power that is available to us through that new birth is channelled to us through the indwelling Spirit and our abiding in Christ.

ii. God the Son is both a source of ongoing power and the model of the perfected man (more below)

Jn. 15:4-5, "Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you, unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

1 Pet. 2:21, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps."

Heb. 12:1-3, "Therefore let us also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him who has endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, that you do not grow weary, fainting in your souls."

iii. God the Holy Spirit helps believers overcome sin and develop the fruit of the spirit, the full development of which is true Christlikeness

Christlikeness is nothing less than manifesting the fruits of the Spirit in our lives.

Rom. 8:10,12-13, "But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness...Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live." (NIV)

Gal. 5:22-23, 25, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law... If we live by the Spirit, let's also walk by the Spirit."

2 Thes. 2:13, *“But we are bound to always give thanks to God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth.”*

b. Our role

Rom. 13:14, *“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, for its lusts.”*

It is possible to frustrate the process of sanctification (i.e., the “growth in grace”, the “gaining of victory over sin”, and the development of the “fruit of the Spirit” in our lives) by not doing our part. We must play our part; and the role we must play in our spiritual development is very large indeed!

The key passage is Romans 6:1-12.

i. We must “reckon” or “count” or “consider” ourselves as being “dead” to sin and alive in Christ

This is sometimes called “counting yourselves as having been united with Christ in his death and resurrection.” This means agreeing with what God says about what believers are in Christ.

Rom. 6:11, *“Thus consider yourselves also to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Gal. 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me. That life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me.”*

Phil. 3:10, *“I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.” (NIV)*

Faith “reckons” (presumes, considers) the fact that our old nature was “crucified with Christ” to be true, and that consequently the power of sin in the believer is broken. Sin can be successfully resisted because a new nature is operative in the believer which draws its life from its ongoing, abiding relationship with Christ, as He himself taught.

Jn. 15:5-8, *“I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not remain in me, he is thrown out as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, throw them into the*

fire, and they are burned. If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, you will ask whatever you desire, and it will be done for you. "In this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so you will be my disciples."

Thus since the moment of their regeneration believers recognize that their new nature in Christ coexists with the old flesh, the old nature, which is no longer dominant. Its power is broken.

Their original human nature was not sinful when originally created, but was corrupted as a result of Adam's fall). The fact that believers are in Christ now means that they also become partakers of the divine nature.

"In Christ"

Over 100 NT references place the word "in" before "Christ". Believers were chosen "in Christ" before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Then they were identified with him in his birth through regeneration (2 Cor. 5:17), in his circumcision by being set apart from the rest of mankind (Col. 2:9-11), in his death because our sins were "nailed to the cross", as a result of which we are to count our old natures as being dead and buried (Rom. 6:3, 11). We live in the light of his resurrection, that is, in newness of life now, and will be raised to life after death, receiving a body like his resurrection body (Rom. 6:5, 1 Cor. 15, Phil. 3:10-11)

ii. We must actively offer every part of ourselves to God on an ongoing basis

We are called to rule. That rule begins over our own bodies. If we cannot gain mastery over that tiny bit of the universe entrusted to us, how can we be expected to rule over anything else? That is why Paul places so much emphasis on controlling "the members of our bodies". Think of this as embodied spirituality.

Rom. 6:13, *"Do not present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."*

Rom. 12:1, *"Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service."*

iii. Practical steps

a) Study and understand the Scriptures

Eph. 5:25-26, *"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word."* (NIV)

When taking a shower you need a strong stream to flow over you to be cleaned, not a drop every five minutes or so. Likewise we need to be washed with the word of God ongoingly.

Psa. 119:9, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word."

Psa. 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

Mat.22:29, "Jesus answered them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God."

Lk. 24:32, "They said to one another, "Weren't our hearts burning within us, while he spoke to us along the way, and while he opened the Scriptures to us?"

Ac. 17:2, "Paul, as was his custom, went in to them, and for three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures."

Ac. 17:11, "Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

Rom. 15:4, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that through patience and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

2 Tim. 3:15, "From infancy, you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus."

b) Respond to the daily events of life in a Christ-like manner

Rom. 5:3-4, "Not only this, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope."

Heb. 12:14, "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." (NIV)

2 Pet. 3:18, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and forever. Amen."

1 Jn. 3:3, "Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure."

Jam. 1:2-4, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various temptations, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. Let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

Luther: *“We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”*

c) Actively “mortify the flesh”

“Embodied spirituality” means, at the very least, gaining control over our bodies. This is called “putting to death” that which continues to emanate from our sinful human nature. You say NO to it. You deprive it of oxygen. This the Christian can rise to, by virtue of the new birth and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Rom. 8:13, *“For if you live after the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

1 Cor. 5:6-8, *“Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole lump? Purge out the old yeast, that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed in our place. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old yeast, neither with the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”*

Gal. 5:24, *“Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts.”*

Col. 3:5, *“Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth: sexual immorality, uncleanness, depraved passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”*

See also Col. 3:12-17.

1 Cor. 9:27, *“I beat my body and bring it into submission lest... after I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.”*

2 Cor. 7:1, *“Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”*

Mortification of the flesh is not asceticism, but it means having to exercise discipline.

d) Utilize the means of grace, that is, the spiritual disciplines

We must utilize the means of grace, i.e., the spiritual disciplines the apostles and saints of the past made use of. These include regular Christian fellowship, confessing our sins to each other, the sacraments, extended times of prayer and times of solitude to gain control over our bodies.

Jam. 5:16, "Confess your offenses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The insistent prayer of a righteous person is powerfully effective."

e) Live life with a sharp focus on building up the church

Keep sharply focused on building up the church, the body of Christ. Let nothing distract from that life-goal. Building up the church is the family business!

Eph. 4:16, "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (NIV)

Heb. 10:24-25, "Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good works, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as you see the Day approaching."

The reason God gives us spiritual gifts is to build up the church.

1 Cor. 14:12, "So also you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek that you may abound to the building up of the assembly."

Eph. 4:29, "Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but only what is good for building others up as the need may be, that it may give grace to those who hear."

1 Thes. 5:11, "Therefore exhort one another, and build each other up, even as you also do."

Never lose sight of the importance of the church! Christ died for her, we must live for her!

f) Witness

Nothing makes the born again Christian happier than when he or she has had a chance to share their testimony or share the gospel.

Ps. 126:5-6, "Those who sow in tears will reap in joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed for sowing, will certainly come again with joy, carrying his sheaves."

Witnessing also forces you to live up to your testimony!

g) Develop a sensitivity for the things that grieve God

Eph. 4:30, *"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit..."*

- The O.T. Prophets can teach us how God feels. They were in emotional harmony with God. Think of the deeply moving way God is seeking to woe Israel back in the book of Hosea, or the pathos in the voice of the weeping prophet Jeremiah.

Jer. 25:4-5, 7 *"And though the LORD has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention. They said, 'Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices... But you did not listen to me,' declares the LORD, 'and you have aroused my anger with what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves.'"*

- Jesus Christ, more than anyone, reveals to us that which grieves God. This includes:

Death. John 11:35, *"Jesus wept."*

Unnecessary pain. Mat. 23:37, *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."*

Unbelief. Mark 6:5-6, *"He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith."*

Stubbornness. Mark 3:5 *"He looked around at them in anger and was deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts."*

- The apostle Paul pleaded with people

2 Cor. 5:20, *"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."*

- God grieves over the fact that some people go to an eternal hell

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and he literally pleads with people to repent and be saved.

Ezek. 18:23,32, *"Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked?" says the Lord Yahweh; and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?... For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!"*

Mat. 18:14, *“your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones (i.e. lost sheep) should perish.”*

God did not create anyone for the express purpose of sending them to hell.

2 Pet. 3:9, *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*

▪ God grieves over the fact that this world is in bondage to Satan

According to Gen. 1, God gave the authority to rule over this world to Adam.

Gen. 1:26, *“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”*

But when Adam fell into sin, the rulership over this now sinful, condemned world fell, for the time being, into Satan’s hands.

1 Jn. 5:19, *“We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”*

The Biblical describes the evil demonic powers as a *“dominion of darkness”* (Col. 1:13), *“power and dominion”, “rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms”, “rulers... authorities... the powers of this dark world... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12), *“rulers of this age”, “spirit of the world”* (1 Cor. 2:8, 12) and *“the elemental spiritual forces of the world”* (Gal. 4:3).

“Dominion of darkness” and “rulers” suggests that the demonic world operates through localized powers. They have to operate that way, because unlike God, Satan is not omnipresent. Though powerful, he is finite. Demons can only be in one place at a time. You catch a glimpse of this in Daniel 10, where an angelic being sent by God was thwarted for a period by a local spiritual being called *“the prince of the Persian kingdom.”*

Authority seems to pertain to particular values (as in, he or she is an authority on a particular issue). Satan speciality is perverting cultural values to his own nefarious ends.

Power suggests control, or the manipulation of people's moral perceptions and subsequent actions through, e.g, the media, education systems, politics, false religions and philosophies.

"Spiritual forces of *evil* in the heavenly realms" emphasis the wickedness of forces which seek to corrupt, alienate, enslave, and ruin people. No wonder this world is full of sad, absurd, inexplicable, grievous events.

Satan is real, and he is powerful.

1 Pet. 5:8, "*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*"

All this grieves God...

▪ God grieves over the results of sin and demonic activity

Sin and its results are awful in God's eyes. The God of the philosophers, this distant, deistic being, doesn't hate or grieve or show emotions of any kind. He is beyond that. Unlike the God of the philosophers, however, the God of the biblical prophets, of Jesus Christ, of the apostles, is deeply involved, emotionally involved, in the life of people. He weeps. He grieves over our alienation from him, over death, over pain, unbelief, stubbornness, the corruption, alienation, enslavement, ruination, absurdities, grievous events which result from sin and Satan.

Just prior to the judgment of the great flood we read these moving words: Gen. 6:6, "*the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart*"

The Excluded Middle

Many westerners poohpoo the idea of actual, personal spirits and demons operating in this world. Typically only Charismatic churches or non-Christian fringe movements place much emphasis on the angelic and demonic realms.

The West is unique in its marginalization of the spirit world. The missiologist Paul Hiebert called it the "excluded middle", arguing that most westerners see the universe as consisting of two tiers: God, distant, far above (the God of the philosophers), and the visible, material world of action and reaction, of science. The excluded middle is the in between spiritual realm of unseen personal beings, such as angels and demonic powers.

Most of the rest of the world recognizes that the spiritual realm is real, though many cultures have twisted views of it as they seek to interact with, or appease it.

▪ God feels deeply about poverty and inequity

1 Sam. 2:8, *“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.”* (NIV)

Psa. 82:3-4, *“Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”* (NIV)

Prov. 14:31, *“He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honors him.”*

Prov. 19:17, *“He who has pity on the poor lends to Yahweh; he will reward him.”*

Prov. 21:13, *“Whoever stops his ears at the cry of the poor, he will also cry out, but shall not be heard.”*

Prov. 22:9, *“He who has a generous eye will be blessed; for he shares his food with the poor.”*

Prov. 28:27, *“One who gives to the poor has no lack; but one who closes his eyes will have many curses.”*

Luke 3:9-11, *“Even now the axe also lies at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not produce good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. The multitudes asked him, “What then must we do?” He answered them, “He who has two coats, let him give to him who has none. He who has food, let him do likewise.”*

1 John 3:17, *“But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and closes his heart of compassion against him, how does the love of God remain in him?”*

James 1:27, *“Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”*

See also Isa. 58:6-10; Mat. 25:41-45; Luke 10:27-37 (parable of the Good Samaritan); 2 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 6:17-19.

“The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life in not to become a saint!”

Leon Bloy, quoted in *The Benedict Option*, p. 76.

27. What is meant by the perseverance of the saints”?

An alternative term for this doctrine is “the eternal security of the believer”. It might best be called “the perseverance of God with his people!”

27.1. What the doctrine means

This biblical teaching holds that the believer is eternally secure in Jesus Christ. He will go to heaven.

“The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.” Grudem 1994, 788.

Notice that Grudem carefully distinguishes the activity of God (“will be kept by God’s power”) from the activity of people (“will persevere as Christians”).

27.2. What the doctrine does not mean

Not everyone who states that he or she is a Christian will be saved, and not anyone who is accepted as a member of a Christian church is eternally secure.

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints requires lasting evidence that faith is genuine, for we must take into account those Bible passages which give assurance of salvation but add a warning in words like, “if you continue ...” and which challenge us in our responsibility to remain firm in faith

The Bible contains numerous strong warnings not to take things for granted.

Jn. 8:31, “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”

Rom. 11:22, “See then the goodness and severity of God. Toward those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness; otherwise you also will be cut off.”

1 Cor. 15:2, “By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” (NIV)

Col. 1:23, “If it is so that you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Good News which you heard, which is being proclaimed in all creation under heaven.”

Heb. 3:6, 14, “Christ is faithful as a Son over his house; whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the glorying of our hope firm to the end.... For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm to the end.”

2 Cor. 13:5, *“Examine your own selves, whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves. Or do you not know as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified.”*

Heb. 2:1, *“Therefore we ought to pay greater attention to the things that were heard, lest perhaps we drift away.”*

2 Pet. 1:8-10, *“For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins. Therefore, brothers be more diligent to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never stumble.”*

See also 1 Cor. 10:1-13.

27.3. Evidence for the doctrine of perseverance

a. The character of God: he cannot change or fail

Psa. 89:34, *“I will not break my covenant, nor alter what my lips have uttered.”*

Psa. 136, *“His kindness endures forever”*

Isa. 49:15-16, *“Can a mother forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet I will not forget you! Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands...”*

b. Salvation is God’s plan, and God’s plans cannot fail

Isa. 54:10, *“For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my loving kindness will not depart from you, and my covenant of peace will not be removed,” says Yahweh who has mercy on you.”*

Rom. 8:30, *“Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified.”*

Rom. 11:29, *“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”*

Phil. 1:6, *“He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”*

1 Pet. 1:3-5, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy became our father again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance that does not fade away, reserved in Heaven for you who by the power of God are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”*

c. The promises of Jesus

Jn. 3:16

Jn. 6:37, 39-40, 44, "All those whom the Father gives me will come to me. He who comes to me I will in no way throw out... This is the will of my Father who sent me, that of all he has given to me I should lose nothing, but should raise him up at the last day. This is the will of the one who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son, and believes in him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

d. The secure hold of both the Father and Jesus

Jn. 10:27-30, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

Rom. 8:35, 38-39, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

2 Tim. 1:12, "I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed to him against that day."

2 Tim. 4:18, "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me for his heavenly Kingdom; to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

e. The gift of the Holy Spirit is a seal of God's ownership and a down-payment of our inheritance

Eph. 1:13-14, "you also, having heard the word of the truth, the Good News of your salvation – in whom, having also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is a pledge of our inheritance, to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory."

2 Cor. 1:21-22, "Now he who establishes us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God; who also sealed us, and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts."

28. What does the Bible mean when it speaks about people apostatizing? (i.e., abandoning the Christian faith)

Apostasy comes from a Greek word meaning "to leave". It is sometimes translated as "fall away".

28.1. This can indicate a permanent apostasy

Mat. 13:21, Parable of the seeds, *"He has no root in himself, but endures for a while. When oppression or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles."*

Mat. 24:10, *"Many will stumble, and will deliver up one another, and will hate one another."*

John 15:6, (Jesus said that) *"If a man does not remain in me, he is thrown out as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned."*

Gal. 5:4, regarding Judaisers going back to circumcision, *"You are alienated from Christ, you who desire to be justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace."*

1 Tim. 4:1, *"But the Spirit says expressly that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons."*

1 Tim. 5:15, *"Already some have turned aside after Satan."*

1 Tim. 6:10, *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some have been led astray from the faith in their greed, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows."*

1 Tim. 6:20-21, *"Timothy, guard that which is committed to you, turning away from the empty chatter and oppositions of what is falsely called knowledge; which some profess, and thus have wandered from the faith."*

Heb. 3:12, *"Beware, brothers, lest perhaps there be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God."*

The picture of shipwreck is used in 1 Tim. 1:19, *"holding faith and a good conscience; which some having thrust away made a shipwreck concerning the faith."*

The biblical record as well as the history of the church is strewn with examples of those who made shipwreck of the faith. Think of Biblical examples of believers who fell away, either temporarily or permanently: Saul, Judas, Demas...

28.2. It can mean a temporary loss of obedience

Mat. 26:31,33- 34, *"Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of me tonight, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered' ... But Peter answered him, "Even if all will be made to stumble because of you, I will never be made to stumble." Jesus*

said to him, "Most certainly I tell you that tonight, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."

Acts 15:38, "But Paul did not think that it was a good idea to take with them someone (i.e. John Mark) who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia, and did not go with them to do the work."

Mal. 3:6, "For I, Yahweh, do not change; therefore you, sons of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my ordinances, and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says Yahweh of Armies."

28.3. Perseverance and apostasy

Examples of apostasy do not prove or disprove the doctrine of perseverance. They create a doctrinal problem whether or not you believe in the doctrine.

If you do believe in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, then you will say of people who have fallen away that they were never true Christians in the first place, even if there was strong evidence that they were.

1 Jn. 2:19, "They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have continued with us. But they left, that they might be revealed that none of them belong to us."

If you do not believe in the perseverance of the saints, then how will you describe people who fall away and later return? Are they being converted again? You will also have problems with your view of God: did he not have the power or the faithfulness to keep his promises of salvation?

If you believe in eternal security but without the need for continuing evidence ("once saved, always saved"), then you must talk about people who have fallen away as backslidden Christians, even if the evidence shows that they no longer believe or behave as Christians.

It is quite possible for people to give all the outward signs of being true believers, but still to turn away and become indifferent or even hostile to the Gospel. Remember the second and third kinds of ground in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:5-6, 16-17).

"The crucial test of true faith is endurance to the end, abiding in Christ, and continuance in his word".

John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 1955, p. 152.

A Pastoral Problem

We meet people who say that they are “born again Christians” even though their lives have not changed. Their priorities and attitudes are no different from those of the non-Christians around them. Should we accept their word for it?

The first letter of John helps answer this question. In 1 John, what is the evidence that a person has been genuinely born again? See 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1; 5:3-4; 5:18. See also: “children of God”: 2:28; 3:1-2; 5:2, 19.

One thing is certain: we may not take our salvation for granted. See 1 Cor. 10:1-13. We must beware of presumption. Doubt, if you are not walking with the Lord, is like pain. It is good, a warning that something is wrong.

29. Do Heb. 6:4-6 and 10:26-31 really mean that we can lose our salvation?

Heb. 6:4-6, *“For concerning those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify the Son of God for themselves again, and put him to open shame.”*

Heb. 10: 26-31, *“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which will devour the adversaries. A man who disregards Moses’ law dies without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think he will be judged worthy of who has trodden underfoot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “Vengeance belongs to me,” says the Lord, “I will repay.” Again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

There are two ways of looking at these verses:

29.1. Option 1: the passage is about people who are intellectually convinced of the truth of the gospel but do not commit themselves to it.

“Once enlightened” (6:4) refers to having understood the essentials of the gospel, but that is not the same as having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. They have experienced “prevenient grace” but willingly decided not to exercise saving faith.

“tasted the heavenly gift” (6:6) refers to a momentary experience, like Jesus “tasting death” (Heb. 2:9). It is like the types of soil in Jesus’ parables which

described people who received the gospel and rejoiced in it for a season, but they are not truly saved because they failed to bear long-term fruit (Mat. 13:3-23)

“falling away” (6:6) refers to those who reject the revelation given them. In doing so they “re-crucify Christ” (i.e. treat him with contempt). Those who do so have no hope of restoration because they have consciously rejected him. In other words, light rejected becomes double darkness.

29.2. Option 2: the passage is about Christians, but presents an argument based on a false premise.

The phrases “partakers of the Holy Spirit”, “enlightened”, “tasted of the heavenly gifts” are taken as descriptive of true Christians.

The key word in the passage is IF in verse 10:26. Here the writer sets up a hypothetical scenario: “If a Christian were to fall away...” However, this is not possible because Christ died for sins once and for all (Hebrews 9:28). IF his sacrifice was not sufficient then there is no hope for anyone—but, thankfully, that is not the case.

Once born again, always born again

The best way to think about all this is that the believer may fall away but won’t because of God’s persevering, keeping grace. These warnings are one of the means God uses to warn and bring back the wavering and backsliding Christian.

30. How can the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints encourage Christians?

The doctrine of perseverance is closely connected to the doctrine of assurance. What assures us that we are saved from the penalty of sin and that finally we shall be saved from the very presence of sin? Not our own hold on God but his hold on us.

1 Jn. 5:13 *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”*

John presents three tests for knowing you are saved:

1. A righteous life,
2. Love for the body of believers
3. Sound doctrine with respect to the person of Christ.

If these things are developing in our lives then we can know that we are saved. And knowing we are saved enables us to rest in God’s faithfulness to us.

Questions we need to ask ourselves:

1. Do I have a present trust in Christ for salvation?
2. Is there evidence of a regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in my heart?
3. Do I see a pattern of growth in my Christian life?

31. What is meant by “glorification”?

Rom. 8:17, 30, *“Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory... And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”* (NIV)

When you remember the seriousness of sin (how it grips us, ruins our present lives, and makes us worthy of the judgment of God’s wrath), then the teaching of the NT that we can share in the eternal glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is truly amazing.

31.1. Definition of glorification

“Glorification is the final phase of the application of redemption. It... brings to completion the process which begins with effectual calling.” (John Murray 1955, 174).

In other words, glorification is our receiving resurrection bodies, reuniting our bodies with our souls:

1 Cor. 15:54-55, *“But when this perishable body will have become imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then what is written will happen: “Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O Hades, is your victory?”*

1 Thes. 4:13-17, *“ But we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you do not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left to the coming of the Lord, will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with God’s trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever.”*

Rom. 8:11, 23, *“But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.... Not only so, but*

ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body."

Phil. 3:20-21, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself."

See also Mat 13:43 and 2 Cor 5:1-10, the passage about groaning until we receive our new bodies.

31.2. Christians will be glorified when Christ returns

All Christians of all time and all nations at the same time will share in Christ's glorification. This is the climax of God's great plan to redeem a people in Christ:

1 Cor. 15:52, "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed."

Col. 3:4, "When Christ, our life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory."

Eph. 5:25-27 "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the assembly, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the assembly to himself gloriously, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without defect."

More of this will be covered in the last chapter, which covers the doctrine of eschatology.

XV

Pneumatology: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

*“The wind (pneuma) blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound,
but do not know where it comes from and where it is going.
So is everyone who is born of the Spirit (pneuma).
(John 3:8)*



JESUS PREDICTED what the Holy Spirit would do, which the Spirit then began doing at Pentecost. However, the Holy Spirit does much more than the things Jesus said he would do.

Much of the NT’s teaching about the Holy Spirit did not take place until decades after Pentecost, when the apostles provided the explanations. Clearly, the Holy Spirit will do his work even if the believer is not fully informed! This matters, because the doctrine is often presented as, “you need to know this in order to experience the full blessing of the Spirit”.

With respect to the gospel you do need to know certain fundamental teachings about the person of Christ and substitutionary atonement. But the Holy Spirit working with regenerating power will develop “fruit” in the lives of believers, and will give gifts to his church, even if we are not fully aware of his “behind the scenes” activities.

Ac. 19:1-3, “While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper country, came to Ephesus, and found certain disciples. He said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ They said to him, ‘No, we haven’t even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’”

1. Why is there less on the Holy Spirit in the Bible than on God the Father or Jesus Christ?

A disproportion of teaching ought to be expected, given the nature of the Spirit’s person and work.

1.1. Unlike the Son, the Spirit is not incarnate

There was no embodied revelation of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit doesn't appear incarnate on the stage of history like Jesus did, so there is no incarnate description of the Spirit available. He is identified indirectly by the effects of his working (like the wind).

Jn. 3:8, "The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

1.2. The Spirit does not have his own independent word about himself to us

Jn. 15:26, "When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me."

Jn. 16:13-14, "When he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming. He will glorify me, for he will take from what is mine, and will declare it to you."

The purpose of the Son in coming in human form was (among other things) to be the self-revelation of God. He is the Word of God to us.

The Spirit, however, does not convey his own self-explanation. Jesus is the Logos, the communication, the living interpretation of God to us. Without the incarnate life and teaching of Jesus we would know far less about the Spirit, for the Son reveals not only himself, but the Father and the Spirit.

We approach the Spirit through the mediation of the Son, even as the task of the Spirit is to draw people to the Son, to form the character of the Son in them, and to form them into a community, a body of which the Son is the head.

Think of the Spirit as, primarily, a "behind the scenes" worker who points to Jesus and seeks to form those who respond to that call into the image of Jesus, both individually and as a community.

1.3. The Spirit remains the Spirit!

This serves a positive purpose. It prevents us from thinking about God in creaturely terms or realities. The Spirit preserves the transcendent spirituality of God. God is not a creature, and so we cannot explain God as if he were a creature subject to creaturely ways and limitations. (We can, however, project back onto God the incarnated nature of Jesus).

2. **If the Spirit is a “behind the scenes worker”, why is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit important?**

2.1. Because, sadly, he is a subject that generates great questions/divisions among Christians today

Something is wrong! We are called to keep the unity of the Spirit, yet allow our ideas about him to divide us.

Eph. 4:3, *“Be eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

1 Cor. 12:13, *“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all given to drink into one Spirit.”*

2.2. Because the Bible does teach much about his person and work.

The Bible speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit from beginning to end.

In Gen. 1:1 we read of the Spirit of God “brooding” over the primordial waters, and in Rev. 22:17 we find him inviting people to receive the free gift of the water of life. Between these references to the Spirit’s work in creation and redemption there is abundant teaching about him.

The teaching about the Holy Spirit in the Bible is progressive. We learn more and more about him as time goes on. For instance, he is given about 18 different names and titles in the OT, and 39 in the NT.

The OT foretold a time when God’s Spirit would be poured out on all mankind, as opposed to his ministry in the OT period itself, when he operated in and through specific people for specific purposes (see 7.1).

Though not crucial to salvation, having a right understanding and experience of the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit is hugely important for God’s people in terms of relating to and worshiping the Triune God.

3. **What is the Holy Spirit NOT?**

People can be led to think of the Spirit as a kind of inanimate power you can tap into to effect wonders. However, he is not a kind of depersonalized power or influence (like electricity) Christians can tap into at will. He may exercise influence, but he is not a mere influence.

Sometimes Christians think, “If I’m going to be blessed by the Spirit, I’ll have to do things just right. If I say just the right words, the right prayer, then the power of the Spirit will work for me or those I love.” In other words, if we fulfil certain conditions just right—then (like magic!) the Spirit is somehow set free to accomplish his ministry on our behalf.

In certain Christian circles a set sequence of events is presented which people think they can control, and which is supposed to enable them to “release the Spirit” to work. If nothing happens the explanation is, “You didn’t get things quite right. You weren’t sincere enough. You didn’t have enough faith. You weren’t humble enough. You were stuck in your head and thinking too much. You didn’t ‘let go’ enough to ‘let God.’” Each teacher of such false views will specialize in describing and prescribing exactly which conditions are called for, as in “this is how you go about releasing the power of the Spirit...” Each of these wrong-headed approaches puts us in charge; it makes the Spirit dependent upon us, with little to say for himself.

Such approaches make our relationship with the Spirit one that is legal (contractual), mechanical and conditional. Like a genie or some mechanical power, the Spirit has no more choice in the matter than electricity has when you plug in your TV or turn on the lights.

Imagined here is a cause-effect relationship from us to the Spirit. Only when the conditions are just right can the Spirit do his work. And when the conditions *are* set just right, the Spirit is presented as unable to say, “No, I’m not going to do your bidding!” We set the agenda and the Spirit somehow comes under obligation to us!

Thankfully, we don’t need to go down those dead-end paths. We can have a more faithful understanding, one that reflects the actual teaching about the nature and character of the Spirit as revealed in the Scripture, and as experienced by the church of NT times.

4. What are some of the symbols the Bible uses to describe the Holy Spirit?

You cannot relate personally to an impersonal force. One relates personally to a friend, a comforter, a helper, etc. However, people often tend to think of the Spirit as a power because of some of the symbolic terms used to describe him.

4.1. Wind/Breath

Symbol of life and regeneration, and the fact that although he is invisible, the effects of his ministry are not.

Ezek. 37:9-10, The vision of a wind stirring through the valley of dry bones, bringing them to life.

Jn. 3:8, *“The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

Ac. 2:2, The Spirit as a wind at Pentecost.

Note that in the Bible the words spirit, wind and breath are all the same (*ruah* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek).

4.2. Fire

Symbol of judgment, purification and the giving of life.

Isa. 4:4, *"The Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from within it, by the spirit of justice, and by the spirit of burning."*

Mat. 3:11-12, *"He (Jesus Christ) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (KJV)*

Ac. 2:3, At Pentecost the "pouring out" of the Holy Spirit was accompanied by flames of fire.

4.3. Water/dew

Symbol of refreshment, life, cleaning, washing. Note the parallelism between water and Spirit, and streams and blessing in the Isaiah passage:

Isa. 44:3; *"For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit on your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring."*

Jn. 7:38-39, *"He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, from within him will flow rivers of living water.' But he said this about the Spirit, which those believing in him were to receive. For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus wasn't yet glorified."*

4.4. Dove

Symbol of gentleness and peace. Note the Spirit's choice of a dove to indicate his presence at Jesus' baptism in Mat. 3:16; Lk. 3:22.

4.5. Oil/Anointing

Symbol of consecration, divine enabling and grace for divinely appointed tasks. Used to anoint prophets, priests and kings for office in the OT (see Lev. 8:30, 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:1; 2 Ki. 9:6, etc.)

Ac. 10:38, *"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." (NIV)*

1 Jn. 2:20, *"You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all have knowledge."*

4.6. Seal

Symbol of ownership and authenticity. The Spirit confirms that we belong to God.

Eph. 1:13, *“Having also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”*

Eph. 4:30, *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”*

2 Cor. 1:22, *“(God), who also sealed us, and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts.”*

4.7. Finger of God

Symbol of God in action. Note the parallelism in the following two passages:

Mat. 12:28, *“But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then God’s Kingdom has come upon you.”*

Lk. 11:20, *“But if I by God’s finger cast out demons, then God’s Kingdom has come to you.”*

4.8. Down payment, pledge

Symbol of the certainty of a future reality.

2 Cor. 1:22, see above.

Eph. 1:13-14, *“Having also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is a pledge of our inheritance, to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of his glory.”*

5. Does the Bible clearly teach that the Holy Spirit is an actual person?

5.1. He possesses all the qualities of personhood

a. He has a mind

Rom. 8:27, *“He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit’s mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.”*

The Spirit speaks his mind, and what is on his mind is the gospel of Christ.

1 Cor. 2:10-13, *“But to us, God revealed them through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For who among men knows the things of a man, except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so, no one knows the things of God, except God’s Spirit. But we*

received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might know the things that were freely given to us by God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things."

b. He has a will

1 Cor. 12:11, "All these (gifts) are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines." (NIV)

c. He has emotions

He loves, can be grieved, insulted, lied to, resisted and blasphemed.

Isa. 63:10, "But they rebelled, and grieved his holy Spirit. Therefore he turned and became their enemy, and he himself fought against them."

Mat. 12:31-32, "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come."

Ac. 5:3, "...you have lied to the Holy Spirit..."

Ac. 7:51, "You always resist the Holy Spirit!"

Rom. 8:26, "The Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we do not know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Rom. 15:30, "...the love of the Spirit..."

Eph. 4:30, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God...."

Heb. 10:29, "How much worse punishment do you think he will be judged worthy of who has... insulted the Spirit of grace?"

5.2. He is referred to using personal pronouns (i.e. as "he" and "him", not as "it") even though the word spirit (*pneuma*) is neutral in Greek

Jn. 14:16, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." (NIV)

See also John 16:7-14.

5.3. He is given the personal title “comforter” (also translated as “counsellor” and “advocate”)

Jn. 14:26, *“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you.”*

Jn. 15:26, *“When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me.”*

Jn. 16:7, *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”*

6. Does the Bible actually teach that the Holy Spirit is divine and co-equal with the Father and the Son?

6.1. He has all the attributes of deity

a. Eternality

Heb. 9:14, *“...the eternal Spirit ...”*

b. Omniscience

Jn. 14:26, *“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you.”*

Jn. 16:12-13, *“When he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming.”*

Rom. 8:26-27, *“The Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we do not know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit’s mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.”*

1 Cor. 2:10-11, *“But to us, God revealed them through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For who among men knows the things of a man, except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so, no one knows the things of God, except God’s Spirit.”*

c. Omnipresence

Psa. 139:7-8, "Where could I go from your Spirit? Or where could I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there!"

d. Omnipotence

Lk. 1:35, "The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore also the holy one who is born from you will be called the Son of God."

e. Holiness

Rom. 1:4, "...the Spirit of holiness..."

Eph. 4:30, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God..."

f. He is the fount of truth

Jn. 16:13, "However when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming."

6.2. He does the works of deity

a. He was present and active in creation

Gen. 1:2, "The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was on the surface of the deep and God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters."

Job 26:13, "By his Spirit the heavens are garnished."

Psa. 104:30, "You send out your Spirit and they (i.e., all creatures) are created. You renew the face of the ground."

Jn. 6:63, "It is the spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life."

b. He was involved in the inspiration of Scriptures

2 Sam. 23:1-2, "The inspired utterance of David, son of Jesse, the utterance of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, the hero of Israel's songs: 'The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.'" (NIV)

2 Pet. 1:21, "For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit."

2 Tim. 3:16, "Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

c. He regenerates sinful man, making them “new creatures” in Christ

Jn. 3:5-8, “Jesus answered, “Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter into God’s Kingdom! That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

d. He plays a role in the resurrection of the body

Rom. 8:11, “But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

6.3. The Bible associates the Holy Spirit closely with the God the Father and God the Son, yet distinguishes between them

a. Association

- i. They are associated at Jesus’ own baptism and in Jesus’ baptismal command in the Great Commission.

Mat. 3:16-17, “Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Mat. 28:19, “Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”

- ii. They are presented as co-equal and eternal in the godhead.

2 Cor. 13:14, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.”

- iii. Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit is one with himself and God the Father, and is sent out from them both.

Jn. 14:16-17, 26, “I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever, – the Spirit of truth...But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you...”

Jn. 15:26, “When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me.”

iv. The Spirit speaks only according to the Father and the Son.

Jn. 16:13-15, "However when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming. He will glorify me, for he will take from what is mine, and will declare it to you. All things whatever the Father has are mine; therefore I said that he takes of mine, and will declare it to you."

Ac. 2:33, "Being therefore exalted by the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this, which you now see and hear."

2 Cor. 3:18, "But we all, with unveiled face seeing the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord, the Spirit."

v. They are linked with respect to ministry to the church.

1 Cor. 12:4-6, "Now there are various kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are various kinds of service, and the same Lord. There are various kinds of workings, but the same God, who works all things in all."

vi. The Bible refers to him directly as God.

Ac. 5:3-4, "But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit... You haven't lied to men, but to God."

1 Cor. 12:4-6, see above.

b. Distinctions

i. The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father in Jesus' name.

Jn. 14:26, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you."

Jn. 15:26, "When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me."

ii. All the persons of the Godhead were present at Jesus' baptism.

Jn. 1:33, "I did not recognize him (said John the Baptist), but he who sent me to baptize in water (i.e., God), he said to me, 'On whomever you will see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'

Lk. 3:21-22, "Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus also had been baptized, and was praying. The sky was opened, and the Holy

Spirit descended in a bodily form like a dove on him; and a voice came out of the sky, saying "You are my beloved Son. In you I am well pleased."

- iii. The Son asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit.

Jn. 14:16, "I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever – the Spirit of truth."

Jn. 15:26, "When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me."

See also: Jn. 16:7-13.

- iv. Believers can approach God the Father through the ministry of the Son as applied by the Holy Spirit.

Eph. 2:18, "For through him (i.e. Jesus) we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father."

7. What was the Holy Spirit's role in the OT period?

7.1. He played a role in creation and the giving of life

Gen. 1:1-2, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was on the surface of the deep and God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters."

Gen. 2:7, "Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Job 26:13, "By his Spirit the heavens are garnished."

Job 33:4, "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."

Psa. 33:6, "By Yahweh's word, the heavens were made; all their army by the breath of his mouth."

Psa. 104:30, "You send out your Spirit and they are created. You renew the face of the ground."

Isa. 40:12-14, "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and marked off the sky with his span, and calculated the dust of the earth in a measuring basket, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who has directed Yahweh's Spirit, or has taught him as his counselor? Who did he take counsel with, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?"

7.2. He enabled specific people to carry out specific ministries/tasks

These people came to be known as “the Lord’s anointed”. Note the terminology used with respect to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

a. He “came (mightily) upon” (or “was in”, “rested on”, “filled”, or “entered”) specific people for specific occasions or purposes

Jud. 6:34; *“But Yahweh’s Spirit came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered together to follow him.”*

Jud. 14:6; *“Yahweh’s Spirit came mightily on him (i.e. Samson), and he tore him as he would have torn a young goat; and he had nothing in his hand, but he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.”*

Num. 11:17; *“I (God) will take of the Spirit which is on you (Moses), and will put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you not bear it yourself alone.”*

Num. 24:2; *“Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel dwelling according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came on him.”*

Jud. 3:10; *“The Yahweh’s Spirit came on him, and he judged Israel; and he went out to war, and Yahweh delivered Cushan Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. His hand prevailed against Cushan Rishathaim.”*

Jud. 11:29; *“Then Yahweh’s Spirit came on Jephthah...”*

1 Sam. 10:10; *“When they came there to the hill, behold, a band of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came mightily on him, and he prophesied among them.”*

1 Sam. 16:13; *“Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the middle of his brothers. Then Yahweh’s Spirit came mightily on David from that day forward.”*

1 Chron. 12:18; *“Then the Spirit came on Amasai, who was chief of the thirty, and he said, “We are yours, David, and on your side, you son of Jesse. Peace, peace be to you, and peace be to your helpers; for your God helps you.”*

2 Chron. 15:1; *“The Spirit of God came on Azariah.”*

2 Kin. 2:15; *“When the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho over against him saw him, they said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” They came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.”*

b. Types of tasks for which the Holy Spirit empowered individuals

i. The interpretation of dreams

Gen. 41:38, *“Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?” (Spoken of Joseph, who had just interpreted Pharaoh’s dream)*

Dan. 4:18, *“This dream I, king Nebuchadnezzar, have seen; and you, Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”*

ii. Artistic and musical ability

Ex. 28:3, *“You shall speak to all who are wise-hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron’s garments...”*

Ex. 31:2-6 *“Behold, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all kinds of workmanship, to devise skillful works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all kinds of workmanship.”*

Ex. 35:31, *“He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of workmanship.”*

iii. Physical prowess

Samson: Jud. 14:6, 19; 15:14.

iv. Effective leadership

Num. 27:18, *“Yahweh said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him...”*

Deut. 34:9, *“Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands on him. The children of Israel listened to him.”*

Jud. 3:10, *“Yahweh’s Spirit came on him (Othniel), and he judged Israel.”*

Jud. 6:34, *“But Yahweh’s Spirit came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered together to follow him.”*

v. Inspiration of the prophets

2 Sam. 23:1-2; *“Yahweh’s Spirit spoke by me (David). His word was on my tongue.”*

2 Chron. 24:20, *“The Spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people, and said to them, “Thus says God, ‘Why do you disobey Yahweh’s commandments, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken Yahweh, he has also forsaken you.’”*

Ezek. 2:1-2, "He said to me, Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you. The Spirit entered into me when he spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard him who spoke to me."

Ezek. 3:24, "Then the Spirit entered into me, and set me on my feet; and he spoke with me..."

Ezek. 8:3, "The Spirit lifted me up between earth and the sky, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem..."

Ezek. 11:5, "Yahweh's Spirit fell on me, and he said to me, Speak, Yahweh says..."

Neh. 9:30, "Yet many years you put up with them, and testified against them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet would they not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands."

Num. 24:2, "Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel dwelling according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came on him. He took up his parable, and said..."

2 Chron. 15:1-2, "The Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded: and he went out to meet Asa, and said to him, "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin! Yahweh is with you, while you are with him; and if you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you."

Mic. 3:8, "But as for me, I am full of power by Yahweh's Spirit, and of judgment, and of might, to declare to Jacob his disobedience, and to Israel his sin."

Ac. 28:25, "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah, the prophet, to our fathers, saying..."

1 Pet. 1:10-11, "Concerning this salvation, the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching for who or what kind of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, pointed to, when he predicted the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that would follow them."

c. The Holy Spirit could withdraw his power/presence from those whom he had anointed

1 Sam. 16:14, "Now Yahweh's Spirit departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Yahweh troubled him."

Psa. 51:11, "Do not throw me from your presence, and do not take your holy Spirit from me."

7.3. The ministry of the Holy Spirit was not available for all without distinction in the OT. It looked forward to such a time

The OT prophets predicted a time when the Spirit would be “poured out” on all mankind, both Jew and Gentile, as a result of the coming of the promised Messiah

Num. 11:29, *“Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all Yahweh’s people were prophets, that Yahweh would put his Spirit on them!”*

Isa. 59:21, *“As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says Yahweh. “My Spirit who is on you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your offspring, nor out of the mouth of your offspring’s offspring,” says Yahweh, “from henceforth and forever.”*

Isa. 61:1, *“The Lord Yahweh’s Spirit is on me; because Yahweh has anointed me to preach good news to the humble. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to those who are bound...”*

The words of Isa. 61:1 were fulfilled in Jesus: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to bring good news to the afflicted and to proclaim liberty to the captives”* (Lk. 4:18)

Joel 2:28-29 *“It will happen afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. And also on the servants and on the handmaids in those days, I will pour out my Spirit.”*

The words of Joel were fulfilled in Acts 2: *“I shall pour out my Spirit, your sons and daughters shall prophesy”*. This was fulfilled at Pentecost. For Pentecost to happen, however, the Lord Jesus Christ had to complete the work of atoning mankind with God.

Ezek. 11:19, *“I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh.”*

Ezek. 36:26-27, *“I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my ordinances, and do them.”*

Isa. 44:3, *“For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit on your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring.”*

8. What was the Holy Spirit's work during the NT era?

8.1. The Spirit's work during the transitional period prior to Pentecost

a. The Holy Spirit proclaimed the forerunner of the Messiah

Lk. 1:41, 67, "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit... His father, Zacharias, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying..."

b. That forerunner, John the Baptist, was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb

Filled with the Holy Spirit means that the Spirit had a controlling influence upon John.

Lk. 1:15, "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb."

c. The Holy Spirit enabled Mary to conceive the Lord Jesus as a virgin

Lk. 1:35, "The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore also the holy one who is born from you will be called the Son of God."

d. The Holy Spirit enabled certainly godly people who had lived their lives in expectancy of the Messiah to recognize him as such

See Lk. 1:41-45; 2:25-32, Elizabeth, Simeon & Anna.

8.2. The Spirit's work in the life of Christ

Basically, Christ's entire life was lived under the control of the Holy Spirit.

In Christ this fundamental question was answered: is the heavenly nature going to triumph over the evil nature of this world? Christ triumphed, doing so in the power of the Spirit.

a. Jesus Christ was filled with the fullness of the Spirit

Jn. 3:34, "For he whom God has sent (referring to Jesus) speaks the words of God; for God gives the Spirit without measure."

b. Jesus Christ was empowered by the Spirit

Lk. 4:14, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee..."

c. Jesus Christ was anointed by the Spirit for ministry

Lk. 4:18, Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Ac. 10:38, *“God anointed him (Jesus Christ) with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”*

d. Jesus Christ taught by the Spirit

Lk. 4:18, see above.

e. Jesus Christ healed people by the Spirit

Lk. 4:18, see above.

f. Jesus Christ cast out demons by the Spirit

Mat. 12:28, *“But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then God’s Kingdom has come upon you.”*

g. Jesus Christ “was vindicated” (or “justified”) by the Spirit

1 Tim. 3:16, *“God was revealed in the flesh, justified in the spirit...”*

h. Jesus Christ was offered at Calvary through the Spirit

Heb. 9:14, *“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without defect to God.”*

i. Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead by the Father through the Spirit

Rom. 8:11, *“But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”*

1 Pet. 3:18, *“Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.”*

j. Jesus Christ taught the early church that the Spirit would empower them to accomplish the work he had for them after his departure

Jn. 14:26, *“He (i.e. the Holy Spirit) shall teach you all things.”*

Jn. 16:7, *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”*

Jn. 16:13, *“He shall guide you into all truth.”*

Ac. 1:2, *“he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.”*

Ac. 1:8, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.”*

Everything Christ did was through the ministry of the Spirit.

At his ascension Christ exchanged his bodily presence with his group of disciples in Jerusalem for the omnipresence of his Spirit with his disciples everywhere. Just as Jesus, while on earth, represented the father, so the Holy Spirit now represents the Son and seeks to conform believers into the image of the Son (see 10.3).

9. What did the Holy Spirit accomplish at Pentecost?

We are accustomed to speak of Christ's one post-resurrection command, the Great Commission, but in reality there were two: "Go!" and "Wait!" (or "Stay!")

Ac. 1:4, "Being assembled together with them, he commanded them, "Do not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me. For John indeed baptized in water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Before they could do anything useful for Christ they had to stay in Jerusalem until the Spirit empowered them. Pentecost was essential for Christian missions.

In Acts 2, the record of Pentecost, the three signs of the Spirit's coming were wind, fire and inspired speech. This is in accord with Jewish traditions of signs of God's presence: wind (*ruach, pneuma*), fire (e.g. burning bush, pillar of fire, consuming fire on Mount Sinai), and inspired speech (e.g., the words of the prophets). In short, Pentecost was a powerful working of God's Spirit inaugurating a new covenant era in which the Spirit would work in powerful, unprecedented ways, in which a fresh concept of God was revealed, and in which newly inspired words would explain and apply the meaning of it all to the new covenant community.

9.1. The Holy Spirit brought the church into being as a new entity

1 Cor. 12:12, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks..."

The implications of the direction the Holy Spirit was moving the apostles into did not immediately dawn on them. It took time for the Spirit to bring some of the leading apostles to the realization that Judaism was being replaced by a new reality, the multi-ethnic church. In fact, they were often taken by surprise. They were compelled to do things they had never thought or intended!

Much of the apostles' early teachings arose out of what the Spirit was doing in and through them. The Spirit worked, as a result of which exciting, new things took place. The explanations followed afterwards, as it became clear to them what the Spirit was in the process of doing.

9.2. The Holy Spirit empowered the early Christian community to witness to the many ethnic groups represented in Jerusalem

The immediate result of Pentecost: they spoke in tongues (i.e., diverse languages). Immediately they started witnessing to the various ethnic groups represented in Jerusalem. The day of Pentecost inaugurated the world-wide missionary enterprise: everyone should hear the gospel in his native tongue.

Mk. 16:17; "These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new languages."

Ac. 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth."

Ac. 2:1-4, "Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all with one accord in one place. Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Tongues like fire appeared and were distributed to them, and one sat on each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak."

Ac. 10:44-46, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word. They of the circumcision who believed were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was also poured out on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in other languages and magnifying God."

Ac. 19:6, "When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke with other languages and prophesied."

10. What does the Holy Spirit seek to do in the life of individual believers after the day of Pentecost?

10.1. He convicts people of sin, then draws them to Christ and into the body of believers

Jn. 16:8-11, "When he (i.e. the Spirit) has come, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment; about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to my Father, and you will not see me anymore; about judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged."

Soon after the Jerusalem mob had violently rejected and crucified Jesus Christ, thousands of them openly confessed their sin and embraced him as Lord and Saviour. This wave spread through the region and beyond.

Ac. 9:31, *“So the assemblies throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, and were built up. They were multiplied, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.”*

See also Ac. 4:4,32; 5:14; 6:2,7; 9:42; 11:21,24; 12:24; 13:44; 14:1; 16:5; 17:4, 12; 18:8).

10.2. The Holy Spirit regenerates sinners (gives them “new birth”)

What, exactly, in human beings does the Spirit regenerate? Their spirits which, since the fall, are dead to the things of God in their natural state. (Note: sanctification takes place at the level of the soul, i.e., the will and emotions. See Ch. XIV, Q. 25)

Jn. 3:5-8, *“Jesus answered, “Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter into God’s Kingdom! That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

Jn. 6:63, *“It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life.”*

10.3. The Holy Spirit seeks to reproduce Jesus Christ in believers

That is why they ended up being called Christians, or “Christ-ones”.

Everything the Spirit does is for Christ. He saves souls to glorify Christ. He instructs believers so that they will glorify Christ (see 8.2). All that the Spirit does, he does for the honour and glory of Christ.

While in his state of humility here on earth the Lord Jesus Christ was the ultimate example of the Holy Spirit working without hindrance in a human being. His entire life was governed by the Spirit. If Jesus was utterly dependent on the Spirit, we should be too!

1 Pet. 2:21, *“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps.”*

This is not easy. When Christ was on earth, he was a stranger who lived by a “different order”. *“The world knew him not”* (John 1:10). The world could not and still cannot understand his ways, his standards, his deity, his humanity, his teachings, his conduct.

Because everything about Christ was of a different order from what we are by nature, we need the Holy Spirit to “form Christ” in us. He does so by giving believers what they need to “grow in Christlikeness” (i.e. develop the

“fruits” of the Spirit) and become effective in service (i.e. develop “the gifts of the Spirit” for building up the church). That includes the following:

10.4. The Holy Spirit indwells genuine believers

Jn. 14:16, “I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever...”

Rom. 8:9, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if it is so that the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his.”

1 Cor. 3:16, “Do not you know that you are a temple of God, and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”

2 Cor. 1:21-22, “Now he who establishes us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God; who also sealed us, and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts.”

10.5. At times the Holy Spirit fills believers

See. Q. 14 about the difference between being baptized and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ac. 2:4, “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak.”

Eph. 5:18, “Do not be drunken with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”

10.6. The Holy Spirit provides believers with a “spiritual armour” to withstand evil and enable them to do that which is right

Eph. 6:11-19, “Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world’s rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having the belt of truth buckled around your waist, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness and having fitted your feet with the preparation of the Good News of peace; above all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; with all prayer and requests, praying at all times in the Spirit, and being watchful to this end in all perseverance and requests for all the saints.

See Chapter X, Q. 11 on spiritual warfare.

10.7. The Holy Spirit teaches and guides believers into the truth

He supernaturally inspired the apostles, and he continues to give people to the church who have the gift of teaching.

Jn. 16:13, "However when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming."

Note that Jesus spoke the words above to the disciples with respect to the gospel they were to preach later.

Ac. 8:29, "The Spirit said to Philip, "Go near, and join yourself to this chariot..."

1 Cor. 2:12, "But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might know the things that were freely given to us by God."

1 Jn. 2:27, "As for you, the anointing which you received from him remains in you, and you do not need for anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and is no lie, and even as it taught you, you will remain in him."

1 Tim. 4:1, "But the Spirit says expressly that in later times some will fall away from the faith..."

Rev. 2:7, 11, 29, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches..."

10.8. The Holy Spirit strengthens and renews believers in their inner being

Eph. 3:14-16, "I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... that you may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man."

Ti. 3:5, "According to his mercy, he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."

10.9. The Holy Spirit enables believers to pray and worship

Jn. 4:23-24, "But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

Rom. 8:26-27, "In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we do not know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God."

1 Cor. 14:15, *“For if I pray in another language, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also. I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.”*

Phil. 3:3, *“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”*

Jude 20, *“But you, beloved, keep building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.”*

10.10. The Holy Spirit seeks to lead and guide believers in ministry

Ac. 8:29, *“The Spirit said to Philip, “Go near, and join yourself to this chariot.”*

Ac. 13:2-4, *“As they served the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Separate Barnabas and Saul for me, for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia. From there they sailed to Cyprus.”*

Ac. 16:6-7, *“When they had gone through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not allow them.”*

Rom. 8:14, *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are children of God.”*

10.11. The Holy Spirit gives believers the power or strength to say “no” to sin

He helps them *“put to death the deeds of the flesh”*

Rom. 8:13, *“For if you live after the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

See Ch. XIV, Q. 26.5

10.12. The Holy Spirit seeks to develop all the “fruits of the Spirit” in believers so they can grow in Christ-likeness

Gal. 5:22-23, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control.”*

Some believers are like cartoon figures of Christ. Some attributes are over developed and some are underdeveloped, leading to an ugly, unbalanced whole!

Surely one of the marks of genuine believers should be joy!

“Jesus was always welcome among those who were having a good time... He did not condemn those who were enjoying themselves, and he was not jealous of them. As a result, he was welcome at their gatherings, and those who had invited him listened to his teachings...

However, all religion, if Jesus Christ does not stand at its core, degenerates into a cold, hard routine, destitute of joy. Apart from him who is the source of life, who is himself the life, religion is joyless and hardens personalities.”

Boice, John. p. 164-167.

“Sepulchral tones may fit a man to be an undertaker, but Lazarus is not called out of his grave by hollow moans... I commend cheerfulness to all who would win souls.”

C.H. Spurgeon, quoted by Boice, *John*, p. 165.

10.13. The Holy Spirit leads believers into Christian service and gives them specific gifts to carry out their particular ministries

All the “fruits” are meant to be developed by all believers. “Gifts”, on the other hand, are given as the Spirit sees fit. No one believer has all the gifts – that is why each believer needs to be part of the larger body of Christ.

Rom. 12:6-8, “Having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, if prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or service, let us give ourselves to service; or he who teaches, to his teaching; or he who exhorts, to his exhorting; he who gives, let him do it with liberality; he who rules, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

1 Cor. 12:8-11, “For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another faith, by the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healings, by the same Spirit; and to another workings of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discerning of spirits; to another different kinds of languages; and to another the interpretation of languages. But the one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing to each one separately as he desires.”

Heb. 2:4, “God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders, by various works of power, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will...”

See also Q. 11:4.

10.14. The Holy Spirit prepares his missionaries for suffering

Ac. 20:22-23, "Now, behold, I go bound by the Spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there; except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions wait for me."

10.15. The Holy Spirit will be the agent who resurrects believers and gives immortality

Rom. 8:11, "But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

11. What does the Holy Spirit seek to accomplish in the church as a body/community?

11.1. He seeks to make the church into a new and living temple of God

1 Cor. 3:16, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that God's Spirit lives in you?"

Eph. 2:19-22, "You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit."

11.2. He anoints and draws together diverse people

1 Cor. 12:12-13, "For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all given to drink into one Spirit."

1 Jn. 2:20, "You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all have knowledge."

11.3. He directs and governs the church through elders

Jesus Christ is the head of the church who directs it by means of the Holy Spirit, who calls people to Christ and equips them to serve in different ministries utilizing the gifts of the Spirit to the church.

Ac. 13:1-3, "Now in the assembly that was at Antioch there were some prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they served the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Separate Barnabas and Saul for me, for the work to which I have called them.' Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

Ac. 15:28, *“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay no greater burden on you than these necessary things.”*

Ac. 20:28, *“Take heed, therefore, to yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the assembly of the Lord and God which he purchased with his own blood.”*

11.4. He gives specific gifts to church members so that the church can function according to its mandate

Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-11, See 10.13.

1 Cor. 14:1, *“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.”*

For 1 Cor. 14 see Q. 13.

1 Pet. 1:12, *“To you, they (i.e., the OT prophets) ministered these things, which now have been announced to you through those who preached the Good News to you by the Holy Spirit sent out from heaven; which things angels desire to look into.”*

“Prophecy in ordinary NT churches was not equal to Scripture in authority but was simply a very human—and sometimes partially mistaken—report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone’s mind.”

W. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, p. 18.

11.5. He disciplines his church

In the case of Ananias and Sapphira the Spirit pressed home the holiness of God and the sanctity of his church. Note that Peter accuses them of lying against the Holy Spirit.

Ac. 5:3, *“But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?”*

11.6. He challenges his church’s prejudices

In Acts 10:19ff Peter was ordered by the Spirit to Caesarea on a mission perplexing to himself and contrary to his Jewish prejudices, but in line with the Spirit’s desire to extend the gospel message to the Gentile world.

11.7. The Spirit presides over deliberative councils

Acts 15 records the first church council, in which the participants noted that,

Ac. 15:28 *“It seemed good to the Spirit and to us...”*

12. What about the gift of healing? Is it still valid today?

Virtually all genuine Christians pray regularly that God would heal them or their loved ones. However, do some people have the gift of healing? 1 Cor. 12:9 states that the same Spirit who gives certain gifts to people, also gives “to another gifts of healings” – and there is no indication in the Bible that this particular gift ended in the first century. In fact, throughout church history there have been strong born-again believers who readily pray for healing and often saw remarkable answers to prayer.

At the same time this gift has been greatly abused by those who falsely claim that health and welfare are “rights” which every believer should be able to claim for themselves in faith.

Divine healing is like a down payment, a security that what God promises with respect to the final state of things will really take place. It is something God graciously gives at times to affirm the gospel or to comfort his children.

13. Is the gift of tongues still valid today?

1 Cor. 14:4-19 clearly spells out the Biblical position on speaking in a language which no one around you understands within a church context.

- Someone moved to utter ecstatic, incomprehensible utterances (glossolalia) must do so in private.
- Anyone speaking any actual foreign language in church must be translated because...
- Teaching in church must be clear and unambiguous.

The above points are so clearly affirmed in the text that it is a mystery to this writer that the subject is as controversial as it is!

1 Cor. 14:4-19 *“He who speaks in another language edifies himself... I desire to have you all speak with other languages, but rather that you would prophesy. For he is greater who prophesies than he who speaks with other languages, unless he interprets, that the assembly may be built up. But now, brothers, if I come to you speaking with other languages, what would I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation, or of knowledge, or of prophesying, or of teaching?... For if the trumpet gave an uncertain sound, who would prepare himself for war? So also you, unless you uttered by the tongue words easy to understand, how would it be known what is spoken? For you would be speaking into the air. ... If then I do not know the meaning*

of the sound, I would be to him who speaks a foreigner, and he who speaks would be a foreigner to me. So also you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek that you may abound to the building up of the assembly. Therefore let him who speaks in another language pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in another language, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.... in the assembly I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in another language."

14. What is the difference between being baptized with the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit?

14.1. Being baptized with the Spirit

Being baptized with the Spirit is a single initiating event which happens when people receive the Spirit's indwelling upon their conversion.

1 Cor. 12:13, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all given to drink into one Spirit."

14.2. Being filled with the Holy Spirit

In the NT this refers to the Spirit's so filling a believer with his joyful presence that it leads to an increased desire for a closer walk with God, refreshment in worship, increased sense of thanksgiving, empowerment for a specific ministry, or increased boldness in witnessing. It is an event that can happen many times in the life of a Christian.

Ac. 2:4, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak."

Ac. 4:8, 31, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "You rulers of the people, and elders of Israel... When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were gathered together. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."

Eph. 5:18-20, "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; singing, and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always concerning all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God, even the Father."

The experience of being filled by the Spirit varies in the lives of believers for it is possible to quench him or grieve him through sinful actions. This will hinder his ongoing work in the believer's life.

1 Thes. 5:19, "Do not quench the Spirit."

Eph. 4:30, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

15. What is meant by "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit"?

15.1. This is called the "unpardonable sin"

Mat. 12:22-32, "Then one possessed by a demon, blind and mute, was brought to him and he healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. All the multitudes were amazed, and said, "Can this be the son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebul, the prince of the demons." Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then God's Kingdom has come upon you. Or how can one enter into the house of the strong man, and plunder his goods, unless he first bind the strong man? Then he will plunder his house. "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters. Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come."

See also Mk. 3:22-30.

15.2. Blasphemy in this context means defiant rejection

In the above passages the Pharisees had received irrefutable evidence that Jesus did his miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit. Because they did not want to accept this (as that would demand a radical new way of thinking), they wilfully preferred to attribute these things to the devil instead. In other words, they defiantly rejected what they knew to be true about Jesus, and instead accused him of being possessed by the devil.

Today the person who defiantly rejects the Holy Spirit's promptings to believe in Jesus and thus dies in a state of unbelief will not be pardoned.

John 3:36, "Everyone who believes in the Son has eternal life, but everyone who rejects the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

Acts 13:46, "Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, and said, "It was necessary that God's word should be spoken to you first. Since indeed you thrust it from

you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles."

16. Should we pray to the Holy Spirit?

Christians typically pray to the Father, through (in the name of) Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Spirit. At times, however, the Lord Jesus Christ is addressed directly. Genuine prayer itself is described as being "in the Spirit".

Psa. 5:2, "Listen to the voice of my cry, my King and my God; for to you do I pray."

Mat. 6:9, "Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy."

Ac. 7:59, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Rom. 8:26, "In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we do not know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Eph. 5:18, 20, "Be filled with the Spirit... giving thanks always concerning all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God, even the Father."

Eph. 6:17-18, "Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; with all prayer and requests, praying at all times in the Spirit, and being watchful to this end in all perseverance and requests for all the saints."

Jude 20, "But you, beloved, keep building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit."

XVI

Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.” (Eph. 5:25-27)



1. What is the difference between a group of believers who meet for Bible study, worship and prayer on a regular basis, and a church?

The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, means “a public assembly” (in Ac. 19:41 it is even used of the mob that tried to lynch Paul). As a theological term, however, the word ecclesiology refers to the study of the nature, structure and functions of the church.

Some Christians think that merely meeting together with a few other Christians is enough. After all, Jesus said that *“If two of you will agree on earth concerning anything that they will ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the middle of them”* (Mat. 18:19-20).

Although Christians getting together is certainly a very good thing, the NT concept of the church is much more than that.

1.1. The NT concept of church⁴⁵

The NT concept of church is not a building, nor just an organized religious entity. It is a distinct community of believers who testify that they have been saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ, and who are committed to serving Christ and to living in fellowship with each other according to the New Covenant realities instituted by the Lord and his apostles.

⁴⁵ Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the NASB. The WEB translation used elsewhere translates the word *ekkesia* as assembly, which is correct. However, the distinct Christian assembly is commonly referred to as the church, the word used in the NASB.

1.2. NT images and descriptions of the church

a. The body of Christ

This image of the church as the body of Christ illustrates the close relationship between the body of believers and its head, Jesus Christ. It also illustrates the essential unity of its members, and the fact that each member is called to play a part.

1 Cor.12:12-27 is a very extensive analogy of the church as the body of Christ, in which each member is called to play his/her part.

Eph. 1:22-23, *“And He (God) put all things in subjection under His (Christ’s) feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”*

Eph. 4:15-16, *“...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”*

Eph. 5:23, *“Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.”*

Col. 2:19, Paul warns the believers against *“...not holding fast to the head (i.e. Christ), from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”*

b. A family/household

The idea of God’s people looking to God as their heavenly father was foreshadowed in the OT, where Israel is called God's son (Hos. 11:1).

Those who are redeemed by Christ are moved by God’s Spirit to call God “father”. They are “adopted into his family”. The idea of the community of believers as members of the divine household is a reminder of the tremendous privilege it has, a challenge to trust the heavenly father to meet its needs, and the fact that family members have rights and responsibilities they are expected to live by.

Mat. 12:49-50, *“And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He (Jesus Christ) said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”*

Rom. 8:14-17, *“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry*

out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."

2 Cor. 6:18, "And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty."

Eph. 2:19, "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household."

Eph. 3:14-15, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name."

1 Tim. 3:15, "I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."

1 Jn. 3:14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."

c. The bride of Christ

The image of the church as a bride, with Christ as the bridegroom, is an image Christ himself used of his relationship with his disciples (see Mk. 2:18-20).

The image shows Christ's unqualified love for the church, the fact that he will not tolerate rival affections, and that her destiny is to be presented pure and spotless to Christ one day.

2 Cor. 11:2, "I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin."

Eph. 5:25-27, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."

Rev. 19:7, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

Rev. 21:9, "Then one of the seven angels... came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

Rev. 22:17, "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."

d. A holy priesthood

The ministry of priests in the OT was to teach, judge, lead worship, model godliness and represent the people before God. Furthermore, Israel was

called to be a priestly nation (Ex. 19:6), meaning it was to intercede on behalf of the nations. These functions were transferred to the church. (See Q. 10)

1 Pet. 2:5, *"You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*

e. The flock of God

The concept of the covenant community being compared to a flock tended to by a caring shepherd was familiar to Israel (Psa. 23, 80, Ezek. 34:15). Jesus took this image and applied it to himself. He calls himself the chief-shepherd; his servants are under-shepherds.

The image evokes a sense of dependence of the sheep on the shepherd, as well as the shepherd's compassion and self-sacrificing care for the flock.

Jn. 10:1-30. In this chapter Jesus portrays himself as the good shepherd of those who hear his voice and follow after him.

Jn. 21:17, *"Jesus said to him (Peter), "Tend My sheep."*

1 Pet. 5:4, *"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."*

f. The branches on a vine

In the OT Israel was referred to as a transplanted vine (Ps 80:8) and as a vineyard tended to by the vinedresser (Isa. 5; Jer. 12:10).

In the NT Jesus claimed to be the true vine (Jn. 15:1-8). On the one hand it speaks of the church's (i.e., the branches) total dependency on the Lord, and on the other hand it speaks of the vinedresser's concern that the branches be fruitful.

Jn. 15:1-2, *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."*

Jn. 15:5, *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."*

g. A crop/harvest

This image suggests the potential for church growth.

Jn. 4:35, *"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest."*

1 Cor. 3:6-7, *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."*

h. A building, a temple, the house/household of God

The image of God dwelling among his people is rooted in the OT picture of God's presence among Israel in the tabernacle and temple. In the NT the image illustrates God's ongoing presence based on Christ, the "foundation stone" of the new, spiritual temple. This temple is a work in progress; its completion will take place in the future.

The image of a temple also illustrates the interconnectedness of each "living stone" (i.e. member) as part of the whole edifice.

1 Cor. 3:9, 11, 16 *"You (Corinthians) are God's field, God's building... For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ... Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"*

Eph. 2:20-22, *"(You) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."*

1 Pet. 2:5, *"You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*

Heb. 3:6, *"Christ was faithful as a Son over His house – whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end."*

Rev. 21:3, *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them."*

i. The people/new Israel of God

This idea, based on the OT concept of God's elect covenant community, expresses God's relationship to the church. Paul describes the church as "the new Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16).

Heb. 9:15, *"For this reason He (Christ) is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."*

See also 1 Pet. 2:9-10.

For different views on God's covenant relationship with the church see Appendix 2, "Four Frameworks of Bible Interpretation".

1.4. The purpose and attributes of a healthy, NT-style church

The model which the book of Acts presents for the church is spelled out as follows: *"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer"* (Acts 2:42).

The church exists:

a. To worship God

The early church had fellowship with God and sought to glorify him communally on an ongoing basis.

Ac. 2:42, 46, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and prayer...Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people."

Jn. 4:23, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to be his worshipers."

b. To elucidate the truth of the apostolic message

Ac. 2:42, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching..."

1 Tim. 3:15, "...God's house, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

c. To promote Christian growth, sharing and fellowship

Ac. 2:42, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship..."

Acts 2:45, "They sold their possessions and goods, and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need..."

Ac. 4:32, "The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul. Not one of them claimed that anything of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common."

Eph. 4:11-13, "He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, shepherds and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, to the work of serving, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (See Ch. XV, Q. 11.4)

1 Jn. 1:3, *"That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us. Yes, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ."*

d. To celebrate the sacraments

Ac. 2:42, *"They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread..."*

e. To glorify God in the world by reaching it with the gospel

Mat. 5:14-16, *"You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do you light a lamp, and put it under a measuring basket, but on a stand; and it shines to all who are in the house. Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."*

Mat. 28:18-20, *"Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Mk. 16:15, *"He said to them, "Go into all the world, and preach the Good News to the whole creation."*

Lk. 24:46-48, *"He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."*

Jn. 20:21-23, *"Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace be to you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."*

Ac. 1:8, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth."*

f. To provide an example of the possibility of unity between widely diverse people

Jn. 17:20-23, *"I pray, but for those also who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me. The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me, and loved them, even as you loved me."*

1 Cor. 12:12-14, *“For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all given to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.”*

Eph. 2:15-16, Christ has made the two groups (Jew and Gentile) into *one new man*.

Eph. 4:1-3, *“Walk worthily of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and humility, with patience, bearing with one another in love; being eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

2. How was the NT church organized?

The apostles played a foundational role by appointing initial leaders and providing teaching and direction with respect to the early church’s theological and practical life. As these early churches “continued steadfastly” they began electing their own elders and administrators, set standards for membership, and forged links with other churches.

2.1. The NT church had recognized leaders (elders and deacons)

The elders were responsible for the overall spiritual oversight and teaching ministry, while the deacons dealt with logistical issues. (See also Q. 5)

Ac. 6:2-4, *“The twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not appropriate for us to forsake the word of God and serve tables. Therefore select from among you, brothers, seven men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word.”*

Ac. 15:6, *“The apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter”* (pertaining to the acceptance of Gentiles into the body of believers).

See Eph. 4:11-13 above.

1 Pet. 5:1-3, Peter, writing to church leaders, *“Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”*

1 Tim 3 and Titus 1 spell out at length the prerequisites for both elders and deacons.

Titus 1:5, *"I left you in Crete for this reason, that you would set in order the things that were lacking, and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you."*

2.2. The NT church disciplined members who fell into gross sin

1 Cor. 5:1, 5-7, *"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles, that one has his father's wife... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole lump? Purge out the old yeast, that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened."*

2.3. The NT church promoted order, yet was not so fixed in its ways that it did not allow the Holy Spirit to move as he saw fit

1 Cor. 14:8-13, 19, *"For if the trumpet gave an uncertain sound, who would prepare himself for war? So also you, unless you uttered by the tongue words easy to understand, how would it be known what is spoken? For you would be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of sounds in the world, and none of them is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the sound, I would be to him who speaks a foreigner, and he who speaks would be a foreigner to me. So also you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek that you may abound to the building up of the assembly. Therefore let him who speaks in another language pray that he may interpret... in the assembly I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in another language... Let all things be done decently and in order."*

2.4. The NT church practiced the sacrament of baptism

The NT church baptised people soon after their conversion as a sign of their obedience and surrender to Christ. Baptism was not seen as something magical but as an outward sign of saving faith in, and identification with Christ. This explains the strong link which the NT makes between baptism and salvation, and its insistence that Christians be baptised into Christ.

Baptism is not necessary for salvation, but it is essential for membership in a church inasmuch as it is a clear command of Christ. Refusing to be baptised is disobedience to Christ. It is a refusal to publicly identify one's self with him, which is a strong indication that the person has not, in fact, been regenerated to newness of life.

The form of baptism in the NT was by immersion. In fact the Greek word *bapto* means to dip, and *baptizo* means to plunge, to immerse (see box p. 401). It typically took place in a river (see Mk. 1:5; Ac. 8: 36, etc.)

Mat. 28:19, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”*

Mk. 16:16, *“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”*

Ac. 2:38, 41, *“Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”*

Ac. 19:4-6, *“Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.”*

Ac. 8:36-38, *“As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.*

Ac. 16:14-40 records the immediate baptism of Lydia and the Philippian jailor upon their profession of faith.

Gal 3:27, *“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*

Eph. 4:4-6, *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”*

The NT suggests that baptism symbolized three things: washing (purification), identification with Christ in his death and resurrection, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

a. Baptism as a symbol of washing/purification

Ac. 22:16, *“Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”*

Eph. 5:25-26, *“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”*

Col. 2:11-12, *"In Him (i.e. Christ) you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."*

Eph. 5:25-26, *"Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word."*

Ti. 3:5-7, *"according to his mercy, he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior; that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*

1 Pet. 3:21, *"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."*

b. Baptism as symbolic identification with Christ's death and resurrection

Jn. 3:5-6, *"Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'"*

Rom. 6:2-4, *"How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."*

c. Baptism as symbolic of the pouring out of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to as water. Baptism and receiving the Spirit are closely tied.

Jn. 7:38-39, *"Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive."*

Ac. 10:44-48, *"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 'Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy*

Spirit just as we did, can he?" And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days."

1 Cor. 12:13, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

d. The biblical form of baptism

The NT teaches that those who have made a conscious profession of faith in Christ should be baptised. There is no clear teaching on infant baptism in the NT, nor are there any unambiguous examples. In fact, the first record of infant baptism was by Tertullian, and dates to around the turn of 3rd century.

Protestant denominations which practise infant baptism maintain that baptism is a sign of the covenant not unlike the covenant God made with Israel as a nation at Mount Sinai. In other words, they hold that there is a parallel between the physical circumcision of infants in the OT and baptism.

However, Colossians 2 turns that around, equating physical baptism with spiritual circumcision – and thus supports the idea that only those who give evidence of faith should be baptised.

Col. 2:11-12, "In Him (i.e. Christ) you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."

Paedobaptists (i.e., those who hold to infant baptism) point out that there are several instances in the NT in which entire households were baptised at once, the assumption being that very young children were present. They also refer to Jesus' invitation to "let the children come to me".

*Mat. 19:14, "But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (note, however, that the word "children" used here, *pais*, does not refer to new-born babies but to young, immature children).*

Ac. 16:14-15, "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me

to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us."

Ac. 16:31-33, "They said (to the Philippian jailor), "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household."

1 Cor. 1:16, "Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other."

The NT assumes that those who are baptized had "received the word" (Acts 2:41), "believed" (Ac. 8:12), had "received the Holy Spirit" (Ac. 10:47-48), been regenerated (Rom. 6), and had "their hearts circumcised" (Col. 2).

There are two Greek words in the NT for baptism. *Bapto* means "to dip, to immerse". *Baptizo* is a stronger word, meaning "to immerse to the point of becoming identified with", as cloth immersed in a dye takes on the colour of that dye, or as a pickle *baptizo* in brine takes on its flavour. This sense of *baptizo* as "immersed in to the point of identification" is what NT baptism is. Thus when it states in Mk. 16:16 that "*he who believes and is baptized will be saved,*" the idea is that those who totally identify themselves with Christ will be saved.

2.5. The NT church practiced the sacrament of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ while celebrating the Jewish Passover on the eve of his fulfilment of the OT sacrificial system. The church has continued the practice from its very beginning as a memorial rite to Christ's redemptive death, as a symbol of fellowship with him, as an expression of anticipation of his future return, and as a symbol of the fellowship of all believers.

The event is meant to be more than simply recalling a historic event. It is a symbolic act of identifying one's self by faith to all that Christ has and will yet accomplish, so that these things become realities in which the believer shares. It is not something in which one may participate flippantly (see 1 Cor. 11-23-25 below). It demands self-examination, personal reception by faith, and is celebrated with other believers who are in fellowship with each other.

The Lord himself is the host, inviting his friends to enjoy fellowship with him. However, he presents himself as the substance of the meal ("This is my body, this is my blood"). The bread and the wine symbolize the saving efficacy of his person. Believers are to continue celebrating the Lord's Supper until he returns.

Mat. 26:26-29, *"While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."*

See also Mk. 14:22-25.

Lk. 22:14-20, *"When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."*

1 Cor. 10:16-17, *"Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread."*

1 Cor. 11:23-29, *"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly."*

2.6. Different denominational understandings of the Lord's Supper

In the course of church history a number of different understandings of the Lord's Supper have developed, each of which reflects a particular doctrinal position.

a. Transubstantiation

This position, held by the Roman Catholic Church, holds that the elements used at communion (i.e. the bread and the wine) are actually, metaphysically, changed in substance when the administering priest consecrates them. An ordained priest must be present to consecrate the host (i.e. the piece of bread) or Christ is not accepted as being present in the bread and wine (this is called sacerdotalism). Participants are said to partake of the literal, physical body and blood of Christ.

“In the eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins... The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: The victim is one and the same: the same one now offers himself through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different... Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner. This sacrifice is truly propitiatory” (italics in original).⁴⁶

This is why none of the host and the wine may be wasted. Normally the entire laity takes the host but only the priest drinks the wine.

b. Consubstantiation

This particular take on the Lord’s Supper was espoused by Martin Luther. Taking Jesus’ words “*This is my body*” (Mat. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24) literally, he believed that Christ’s body and blood are actually, physically, present in the bread and the wine. Christ is thought to be present “in, “under” and “with” the bread and the wine. The idea is that the elements contain Christ's body and blood, without being transformed into them (a bit like a sponge filled with water).

Unlike Roman Catholics, Luther rejected the idea of the Lord’s Supper as a sacrifice, recognizing that Christ died for our sins once and for all.

Heb. 9:27, “*As it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.*”

Heb. 10:10, “*We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*”

⁴⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edition. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. p. 344.

Luther also rejected sacerdotalism, the idea that an ordained priest must officiate or Christ is not present, holding that Christ is present not because a priest is present but as a result of his own power.

c. The Reformed Position

The Reformed (Calvinist) view of the Lord's Supper is that Christ is spiritually present in the Lord's Supper, but not physically or bodily. Participants are nourished spiritually by partaking of the bread and the wine, through which the Holy Spirit brings them closer to Christ, the head of the church. In other words, the bread and the wine represent the body and blood of Christ, and also seal Christ's love for the believers, assuring them of the riches of God's sovereign, covenant relationship with them.

d. The Free Church, Baptist, Anabaptist and Zwinglian Position

Baptists view the Lord's Supper as a commemoration, pure and simple. The bread and the wine are reminders which symbolize Christ's death, the efficacy of which is determined by the participant's faith.

Zwingli rejected the notion of the physical presence of Christ in the elements because the ascension of the risen flesh of Christ, and that risen humanity, to be genuinely human, could not be omnipresent.

One of the tragedies of the Reformation is that the reformers could not agree on the nature of the Lord's Supper. Their fierce differences on the subject of the sacraments led to the earliest divisions in Protestantism.

3. What other concepts are associated with the NT idea of church?

3.1. The universal church and the local church

The term universal church refers to that great assembly of believers which Christ purchased with his blood, through all generations and across all nations.

Ac. 20:28, "Take heed, therefore, to yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of the Lord and God which he purchased with his own blood."

1 Cor. 15:9, "I am the least of the apostles, who is not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

Eph. 1:22, "He (God) put all things in subjection under his (Christ's) feet, and gave him to be head over all things for the church."

The term local church refers to local groups of believers as found in Acts 2:42, etc.

Ac. 15:41, *"He (Paul) went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."*

Rom. 16:5, *"Greet the church that is in their house."*

1 Cor.1:1-2, *"Paul... to the church of God which is at Corinth."*

1 Cor. 16:19, *"The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house."*

3.2. The visible church and the invisible church

The concept of the visible church is the church as we see it, with all its weaknesses, issues, sins and shortcomings.

The concept of the invisible church is the church as God sees it, as the "bride of Christ" which he purchased at great cost to himself and which he is in the process of perfecting.

3.3. The church militant and the church triumphant

The concept of the church militant is the redeemed community standing for and fighting for the truth of the gospel in a hostile world.

The concept of the church triumphant is the redeemed community in heaven.

3.4. The pan-temporal and the pan-cultural church

The concept of the pan-temporal church refers to its identity across time and eternity. The Bible portrays the church as a body which exists both on earth in time, as well as in the spiritual realm.

Eph. 1:3, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ..."*

Eph. 2:6, *"(Christ) raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."*

Eph. 3:10, *"... (in order that) the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places."*

The concept of the pan-cultural church refers to the fact that God is reconciling people *"from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues"* (Rev. 7:9) to himself.

Col. 3:9-11, *"You laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him – a renewal in which there is no distinction*

between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, ¶barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all."

4. What was meant by the concept "emergent church"?

The "emergent church" was a protest movement critical of certain aspects of evangelicalism, and sought to create a fresh expression of the Christian faith and of church life. The movement peaked in the first decade of the 21st century.

Many in the movement held that in their zeal to purge the church of anything that smelled of Roman Catholicism the reformers purged the church of a lot of things which were not intrinsically bad – like the incorporation of art (think icons and statues) in worship, or the perceived depth and meaning of the ancient liturgies – and that Protestantism has since fossilized and become superficial to the point of irrelevance.

Emergent church proponents were critical of contemporary shallowness and consumer-drivenness, or of perceived fundamentalism and doctrinal narrowness. They rebelled against traditional preaching styles which did not involve people in the learning process, and against worship and music styles which did not connect with the culture, etc. In short, it sought to be a renewal movement, but one with a strong concentration on all that was perceived as being wrong with the church. It re-examined the question of why the church exists, sought to contextualize church-life to a post-modern culture by re-evaluating the content of the Christian faith against the background of a rapidly changing culture, and sought to communicate its message using the whole range of technology available to it. In fact, the easy availability of technology enabled the movement to voice its concern and criticisms widely.

There were different streams within the emergent movement. On the theologically conservative side there were (and still are) those who want to update styles of worship, preaching, church structure and leadership.

Those on the other side of the spectrum questioned and re-defined fundamental evangelical doctrines like penal substitutionary atonement. Those on the extreme side of the movement were very disparaging of the traditional idea of church altogether. They want to get rid of pastors and preaching/teaching to create a "fresh space" to allow a "new movement" to emerge. These are the ones who marketed effectively and received the most attention.

5. Who should run the church?

What are the qualifications for church leadership? How does one become a recognized church leader?

Traditionally the words priest and clergy are used to distinguish “ordained” ministers from the laity. However, the NT emphasizes the priesthood of all believers, a doctrine which was wonderfully reclaimed during the Protestant Reformation.

1 Pet. 2:9, *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*

5.1. Ministry involves the whole church.

According to the NT ministry involved the whole church, the role of leaders being to “equip the saints” for service. Paul lists apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers as Christ’s gifts to the church, whose function is to build up the members of the church.

1 Cor. 12:7-13, *“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.”*

Eph. 4:11-13, *“He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, or the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”*

A very simple thing every believer can do is reach out and get alongside new attendees on a regular basis. Another thing is to develop an open, honest relationship with a trusted fellow Christian in which you spur and encourage each other in the faith, and keep yourselves accountable to one another.

However, the NT church created a number of official roles to give the movement structure.

5.2. Elders

The Greek word normally translated as elder is *presbyteros*. It was a title of respect for an older person as well as for community leaders. It is the word from which the Presbyterian church derives its name.

Ac. 14:23, *"When they (i.e. Paul and Barnabas) had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."*

Acts 20:17, *"From Miletus he (Paul) sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church..."*

Ti. 1:5, *"I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city."*

See also Acts 11:30.

They were to preach, teach, shepherd the flock, be examples, direct the affairs of the church well, and lead in prayer for the sick.

1 Pet. 5:1-5, *"I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders."*

1 Tim. 5:17, *"The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."*

Jam. 5:14-15, *"Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him."*

5.3. Bishops (overseers)

The Greek word translated as bishop is *episkopos*, which means overseer. Not only is the list of qualification for these overseers virtually the same as for elders, the words elder and overseer are used interchangeably. For instance, in Acts 20:17 the leaders of the Ephesian church are identified as elders, but in Acts 20:28 they are called overseers. The words are also used interchangeably in Titus 1:5 and 1:7.

1 Tim. 3:1-7, *"If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert,*

so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

5.4. Deacon

The Greek word *diakonos*, from which English derives the word deacon, is a general term for servant, or paid employee (as distinct from a slave).

The NT uses it to describe those who serve the church in a variety of capacities, including teaching and preaching.

1 Cor. 3:5, *"What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants (i.e. deacons) through whom you believed."*

Eph. 6:21, *"But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister (deacon) in the Lord, will make everything known to you."*

Col. 1:7, *"You learned it (i.e. the gospel) from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant (deacon) of Christ on our behalf."*

1 Tim. 4:6, *"In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant (deacon) of Christ Jesus."*

Elsewhere the term seems to indicate a specific office. Those chosen as deacons in Acts 6 were to deal with the logistical issues of the church in order to set the apostle free to preach and pray.

Acts 6:2-4, *"The twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve (verb diakonein used here) tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

1 Tim. 3:8-12, *"Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."*

5.5. Apostles

The Greek word *apostolos* means "sent one", or personal representative who has the authority to speak on behalf the one who sent them.

In the NT the word is used to designate those who had seen Jesus Christ after his resurrection and had received a specific commission from him. The last apostle was probably John, who lived almost to the end of the 1st century.

Ac. 1:22, 26 "Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us – beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection...they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.."

Besides the 11 remaining disciples, Matthias (see above), Barnabas (Ac. 14:14), James (Jesus' half-brother) (Gal. 1:19, 2:9, 1 Cor. 15:7-9), and Andronicus (Rom. 16:7) are identified as apostles.

Paul was also recognized as an apostle, though as one "abnormally born"; he came to faith after the resurrection, but Jesus Christ supernaturally revealed himself to him on the road to Damascus.

1 Cor. 9:1, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"

1 Cor. 15:4-10, "He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am."

5.5. Prophets⁴⁷

a. Prophecy in the early church

Prophecy in the NT sense does not have the same "weight" attached to it as did the words of the OT prophets, who spoke and wrote the word of the Lord with divine authority. To disbelieve or disobey the OT prophets was to disbelieve or disobey God (Deut. 18:19; 1 Sam. 8:7, etc.).

In the NT those who spoke and wrote God's word in the OT prophetic sense are called apostles, a term Jesus Christ himself gave them. In other words, in terms of the inspired nature of their writings, the apostles are the NT counterparts of the OT prophets.

⁴⁷ For an excellent treatise on prophecy in the New Testament see Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1988. This section draws heavily from Grudem's book.

1 Cor. 2:13, *“We also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit.”*

Gal. 1:8-9, 11-12 *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!... For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

1 Thes. 2:13, *“We also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God.”*

The apostle Peter clearly spells out that the words of the apostles were on the same plane as those of the prophets of old. The apostles had no “apostolic successors”. Subsequent generations of Christians were to base their Christian faith and practice based on the words of the apostles, not on succeeding generations of prophets.

2 Pet. 3:2, *“You should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.”*

The reason Christ chose the word apostle for his spokespersons was probably because by the 1st century the Greek word for prophet, *prophetes*, came to be widely used both in Israel and beyond to designate those who heralded things they perceived truth, whether that be religious, ethical or philosophical, without claiming divine authority.⁴⁸

Likewise, NT prophets did not speak with infallible, divine authority. Basically, they were Christians who shared that which they sensed the Lord had brought to their minds. The early church did not receive these spontaneous thoughts as being on a par with the authoritative words of the apostles, and there is no record of a NT prophet beginning his exhortation with “thus says the Lord...” In fact, the apostle Paul pointedly ignored the words of the prophet Agabus – even though things turned out exactly as the man had foretold! (Ac. 21:10-14).

Christians were not to despise these types of prophecies, but were to test them to see if they lined up with the truth as revealed by the apostles.

⁴⁸ See Grudem, p. 315.

1 Thes. 5:20-21, *“Do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.”*

1 Cor. 14:29-31, 33 *“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted... God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”*

As the above passage indicates, prophecy in the NT church consisted largely of spontaneous exhortation which, if not carefully regulated, could (and did) lead to confusion at times. The word revelation used in this context simply refers to a communication from God which is not authoritative for all.

Phil. 3:15, *“Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you.”*

See also Rom. 1:18, Eph. 1:17.

b. So what is the role of prophecy in the church today?

If we think of prophecy as “telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind” (Grudem p. 313), then most genuine Christians can probably testify that they have experienced it. Think, for instance, of asking the church to pray for a very specific thing pertaining to a particular situation which has spontaneously come to mind, which you cannot shake, and which you sense is from God.

These spontaneous utterances are not to be dismissed immediately or belittled, but to be carefully examined.

1 Thes. 5:20-21, *“Do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.”*

1 Cor. 14:29, *“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.”*

Real, spontaneous God-given insights into particular situations are valuable, may be sought, and can be a strong testimony.

1 Cor. 14:1, *“Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.”*

1 Cor. 14:39, *“Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy...”*

1 Cor. 14:24-25, *“But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his*

heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you."

Examples of prophecy in the NT included anything upbuilding or edifying, including the revelation of sin as well as imminent future events (Ac. 11:28, 21:11; 1 Cor. 14:25).

1 Cor. 14:3, "*One who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.*"

It is something which will continue to exist until the Lord comes again. At that time this imperfect gift will pass. There will be no need for it anymore, as people will then live in the perfect light of the gospel.

1 Cor. 13:9-10, "*For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.*"

Note that prophecy in the NT sense has less authority than teaching the word. Prophecies are to be evaluated by the word. Paul repeatedly instructs church leaders to focus on teaching (see 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 4:11, 6:2), and churches were encouraged to hold firm to the traditions they were taught (2 Thes. 2:15). Church elders were to be teachers (1 Tim. 3:2, 4:16, 5:17; Ti. 1:9).

If someone really does think God is bringing something to mind which should be reported to the congregation, there is nothing wrong with saying... "It seems to me that the Lord is showing us..." or some similar expression. Of course that does not sound as "forceful" as "Thus says the Lord", but if the message is really from God, the Holy Spirit will cause it to speak with great power to the hearts of those who need to hear—even when it is introduced with some hesitation.

Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, p. 319

6. Is there a role for women in ministry?

The Bible refers to quite a few women who were active in the ministry of the early church. The four daughters of Philip, one of the original deacons, were prophetesses, and Paul's list of qualification for deacons in 1 Timothy suggests that both men and women fulfilled this role. Paul calls Phoebe a deaconess.

Ac. 21:8, "*We reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.*"

1 Tim. 3:8-12, "*Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious*"

gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households."

Rom. 16:1, *"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant (deacon) of the church which is at Cenchrea... she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well."*

Rom. 16:3, *"Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles."* The fact that Prisca's (or Priscilla's) name is mentioned first may imply that she was the more prominent of the two. Their ministry is also mentioned in Acts, where they instructed Apollos.

Rom. 16:6, *"Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you."*

Rom. 16:12, *"Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord."* (Tryphaena and Tryphosa are women's names meaning "Dainty" and "Delicate". Persis means "Persian lady".)

The gospel elevated women far beyond anything which existed in Roman society, which did not even view women as having souls. In terms of relating to God in Christ, every spiritual blessing was available to them as much as it was to men.

Gal. 3:26-29, *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."*

Although there was little room for hierarchy in the early apostolic church (people were to be in submission to one another Eph. 5:11), Paul held that the public teaching ministry be reserved for men.

1 Tim. 2:12-14, *"But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression."*

7. Why should Christians commit to a church?

Joining a church will not save you from the penalty of your sin any more than any other good work. In fact, non-Christians should not be admitted to church membership. Spiritually healthy Christians, on the other hand, will want to join a church.

7.1. Evidence of church membership in the early church

The early church had clear ideas as to who its members were, and these people could be removed from or restored back to the fellowship if the others thought this was warranted.

1 Cor. 5:2, *"You are puffed up, and did not rather mourn, that he who had done this deed might be removed from among you."*

2 Cor. 2:6-8, *"This punishment which was inflicted by the many is sufficient for such a one; so that on the contrary you should rather forgive him and comfort him, lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his excessive sorrow. Therefore I beg you to confirm your love toward him."*

The early church kept an actual list of its older widows.

1 Tim. 5:9, *"Let no one be enrolled as a widow under sixty years old..."*

God himself is portrayed as keeping a list of those who belong to the church universal. It is referred to as The Book of Life.

Psa. 69:28, *"Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written with the righteous."*

Phil. 4:3, *"I beg you also, true partner, help these women, for they labored with me in the Good News, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."*

Rev. 3:5, *"He who overcomes will be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no way blot his name out of the book of life."*

Rev. 20:15, *"If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire."*

7.2. Individual Christians are given gifts for the purpose of building up the church

The NT uses the analogy of a body to describe how Christians should serve the church according to their gifts, to enable it to be what it should be.

Eph. 4:11-13, *"He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, shepherds and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, to the work of serving, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..."*

7.3. Being a member of a healthy church strengthens one's assurance of salvation

Jn. 14:21; 15:10, 14; 13:17), *"One who has my commandments, and keeps them, that person is one who loves me. One who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him."*

Jn. 15:10, 14 *"If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love... You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you."*

Assurance of salvation comes from living in obedience to the New Covenant realities instituted by Jesus and his apostles.

7.4. Christian discipleship takes place in the context of a healthy church

It is within the context of a healthy church that Christians find mutual encouragement, sound teaching and accountability. Furthermore, membership of a church is that church's endorsement of the authenticity of the individual's faith in Christ. It cannot do so if you are not in fellowship with the rest of the community of believers.

7.5. Discipline of Christians takes place in the context of a healthy church

A healthy church seeks to live within the parameters of New Covenant teachings. It will, therefore, first seek to restore, and then exclude, those who stubbornly insist on refusing to live by those principles.

Mat. 18:15-17, *"If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two more with you, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the assembly. If he refuses to hear the assembly also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector."*

1 Cor. 5:1-5, *"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles, that one has his father's wife. You are puffed up, and did not rather mourn, that he who had done this deed might be removed from among you... In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you being gathered together... are to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."*

1 Cor. 5:13, *"Put away the wicked man from among yourselves."*

Gal. 6:1, *"Brothers, even if a man is caught in some fault, you who are spiritual must restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself so that you also are not tempted."*

7.6. A healthy church is God's appointed agent for evangelization and missions

When Christians gather for worship, teaching and service they best show the world what Christianity is all about. (See Q. 10)

7.7. A healthy church is God's appointed means for biblical teaching

Part of the church's mission is to defend the gospel, as well as expose and debunk error and false teaching.

It is the job of pastors/teaching elders to faithfully preach the “word of truth” (Col. 1:15) to their congregations so that they are not “blown about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14).

Ac. 18:11, “And he (Paul) settled there (Corinth) a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

1 Cor. 4:17, “For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.”

Col. 3:16, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

2 Thes. 2:15, “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.”

1 Tim. 3:2, “An overseer, then, must be above reproach... able to teach.”

1 Tim. 6:2, “Teach and preach these principles.”

2 Tim. 2:2, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

7.8. Membership of a healthy church nurtures Christlikeness

Being a member of a church helps us appreciate Christianity’s corporate nature. Christians are to care for each other. Though they do this imperfectly, they nevertheless seek to encourage each other to grow in Christian maturity.

7.9. Christians should join a church in order to glorify God

A loving, witnessing Christian community glorifies God.

Mat. 5:16, “Let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Jn. 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

1 Pet. 2:11-12, “Beloved, I beg you as foreigners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having good behavior among the nations, so in that of which they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they see, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

8. What is involved in being a church member?

8.1. Church members have been baptized

Different denominations and churches have different ideas about baptism, but all agree that church members must be baptized. Jesus Christ made it clear that the missionary mandate includes baptism.

Mat. 28:19-20, "Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you."

All through the book of Acts the disciples understood and carried out this command.

8.2. Church members partake of the Lord's Supper

The church corporately partaking of the Lord's Supper symbolizes its unity as a community which is living by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. At the same time the individual Christian communicates that they are persevering as Christians.

The Lord commanded his disciples to continue celebrating the Lord's Supper in remembrance of him. Years later the churches faithfully carried out this sacrament, as seen in the church of Corinth. In fact, their misuse of the Lord's Supper had corporate consequences.

Lk. 22:17-20, "He received a cup, and when he had given thanks, he said, 'Take this, and share it among yourselves, for I tell you, I will not drink at all again from the fruit of the vine, until God's Kingdom comes.' He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave to them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you. Do this in memory of me.' Likewise, he took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'"

1 Cor. 11:23-30, "For I (Paul) received from the Lord that which also I delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread. When he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'Take, eat. This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in memory of me.' In the same way he also took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink, in memory of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks the Lord's cup in a way unworthy of the Lord will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy way eats and drinks judgment to himself,

if he does not discern the Lord's body. For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep (i.e., have died)."

8.3. Church members attend church on a regular basis and contribute to its life by using the gifts the Lord has given them

a. Church attendance is one of the Christian's basic ministries

Heb. 10:24-25, "Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good works, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as you see the Day approaching."

b. The NT uses the image of a building for the church in which individual Christians are the "bricks"

Eph. 2:19-22, "So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit."

1 Cor. 3:9, "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

c. The NT uses the image of a body, of which individual Christians are the parts

Rom. 12:4-8, "For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, if prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or service, let us give ourselves to service; or he who teaches, to his teaching; or he who exhorts, to his exhorting; he who gives, let him do it with liberality; he who rules, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

1 Cor. 12:12-26, "For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all given to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot would say, "Because I'm not the hand, I'm not part of the body," it is not therefore not part of the body. If the ear would say, "Because I'm not the eye, I'm not part of the body," it's not therefore not part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the smelling be? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body, just as

he desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now they are many members, but one body. The eye cannot tell the hand, "I have no need for you," or again the head to the feet, "I have no need for you. No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. Those parts of the body which we think to be less honorable, on those we bestow more abundant honor; and our unrepresentable parts have more abundant propriety; whereas our presentable parts have no such need. But God composed the body together, giving more abundant honor to the inferior part, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. Or when one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."

Eph. 1:22-23, "He (God) put all things in subjection under his (Jesus Christ's) feet, and gave him to be head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

See also 1 Cor. 10:16-17; Eph. 2:16, 4:12, 5:23, 30; Col. 1:18, 2:20,

d. God gives gifts to individual church members for the purpose of building up the church

1 Cor. 12:27-31, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. God has set some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracle workers, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, and various kinds of languages. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all miracle workers? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with various languages? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts."

Eph. 4:11-12, "He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, shepherds and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, to the work of serving, to the building up of the body of Christ."

8.4. Church members are to love each other

Christian love is demonstrated in a wide variety of ways, such as tithing, welcoming visitors, praying for one another, encouraging each other in the Lord, helping each other with respect to material needs, getting involved in some of the church's ministries, etc.

Jn. 13:35, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

1 Jn. 4:20, "If a man says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

8.5. Church members witness about their faith to the world

The fact that ordinary Christians in the early church embraced Christ's command to be his witnesses is probably the most important factor explaining its astonishing expansion. Tertullian, writing around the year 200, declared, "We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, marketplaces, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum—we have left you nothing but the temples of your gods."

Tertullian, Apology, Ch. 37.

9. On what basis should churches discipline their members?

There are two types of discipline within the context of the church, notably formative and corrective.

9.1. Formative discipline

Formative discipline is a normal aspect of church life, part of its ministry of helping people grow in Christ-likeness through teaching, mutual accountability, encouraging and exhorting one another in terms of repentance, self-discipline, study, obedience and the pursuit of holiness. It is part of being accountable to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

9.2. Corrective Discipline

Corrective discipline is the church's response, based on clear NT admonitions, to those who deny or disobey the fundamental teaching of the faith, who sow discord, who are unruly, or who live in gross immorality.

Excommunication, in which someone is denied fellowship in the church community until they repent, is its most extreme form.

Rom. 16:17-18, "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting."

1 Cor. 5:1-2, 5, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst... I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

1 Cor. 5:12, "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves."

1 Thes. 5:14, *"We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly."*

2 Thes. 3:14-15, *"If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."*

1 Tim. 6:3-5, *"If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that ^{the}godliness is a means of gain."*

Ti. 3:10-11, *"Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned."*

9.3. The basis for church discipline

a. The clear admonitions of the NT.

See 9.2.

b. The Lord disciplines his children

Heb. 12:5-11, *"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."*

c. The Lord has delegated the disciplining of errant members to the church

1 Cor. 5:12-13, *"For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves."*

2 Cor. 2:6, *"Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority..."*

d. God's desire is that the church reflects his holy character

1 Cor. 5:6-7, *"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch – as you really are."*

1 Pet. 1:14-16, *"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."*

Heb. 12:11, *"He (God) disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness."*

1 Cor. 4:6, *"Do not go beyond what is written."*

Gal. 6:1, *"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted."*

1 Tim. 5:20, *"Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses."*

e. Discipline is important for the church to maintain its testimony and authenticity before the world

Mat. 5:13-16, *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

1 Pet. 2:12, *"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."*

1 Pet. 4:4, *"They (i.e. the pagans) are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you."*

9.4. The administration of church discipline

Church discipline must be based on the clear commands of Scripture, based on clear evidence, and not applied with undue harshness.

Initially a private meeting should be arranged to admonish the offender(s). If that fails a second meeting with several witnesses should be arranged to admonish and warn the individual(s). If that has no effect, the matter must

be raised with the church as a whole, upon which the individual is removed from membership and should be avoided. If the person repents they are to be forgiven and restored to fellowship. In the process those handling the issue should be careful not to abuse their authority nor allow themselves to be tainted by the sin in question.

Mat. 18:15-17, "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

Ti. 3:10, "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them."

1 Cor. 5:12-13, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."

Rom. 16:17-18, "I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people."

Gal 6:1, "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted."

10. What is the church's missionary obligation?

A NT church's missionary outreach must be clearly rooted in NT teachings and apostolic precedent⁴⁹, be church-based and church-focused, and be recognized as truly Christian by fellow Christians from any country—democratic or otherwise—and of any race, any culture, or any economic background.

Being perceived as truly Christian means it must where necessary clash at a theological level with prevailing cultural standards, yet seek to present its message in culturally and morally/ethically acceptable ways. In other words, it

⁴⁹ A popular theology of missions, commonly known as *Missio Dei*, holds that the church's missionary mandate must be based on the OT as much as on the new, and that the church must involve herself in everything and anything God is doing. This leads to dangerous distortions (see Appendix 3).

cannot avoid certain frictions at a civilizational and theological level with the prevailing culture as it seeks to communicate its message clearly.

By its alternative way of life as a Christian community, the church must present a counterculture with an alternative set of values which stands in quiet condemnation of dominant worldviews, whether that be ultra-nationalism, untrammelled materialism, state-sponsored terrorism, Islamic extremism or any of a host of other ideologies,

Historically most Protestant Christians will concur with the following definition:

Mission is the church's God-given, Holy Spirit-empowered task to so present the person of Jesus Christ to those unreached with the Gospel that they face a solemn, personal decision to accept or reject Him as their Lord and Savior, to disciple new believers by teaching and modeling Christian truth and values, and to plant local churches according to the New Testament pattern so that believers are established in the teachings of the Christian Scriptures, develop Christian graces, and become equipped to minister to each other and to witness to society (Pikkert 2008:190).

This definition incorporates the Trinitarian nature of missions, the evangelistic emphasis on the free offer of grace and the need for a personal decision, the importance accorded to a transformed life, the focus on establishing local churches, and the obligation that the church, the new covenant community, has to model Christian values. It is based on the church setting out to “do all that Christ commanded them to do” (Mat. 28:20), as interpreted to the church by his apostles, notably the apostle Paul.

10.1. Keep the role of the church in Christian missions central

God's agent in the realm of saving grace is the church. God specifically ordained and equipped the church—and only the church—for the task of Christian missions. Only the church, and not various and sundry parachurch ministries, is uniquely equipped for the task of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Missions is “a law that expressed the nature and that governs the life of the church” (Boer 1975:217) and, as such, cannot be replicated by or ceded to other institutions without it losing its essential character.

This means that the church's mission is much more specific than the way Christians are to live their daily lives. The specific mission of the church is to go to the four corners of the world to declare the gospel of God's redeeming grace in Jesus Christ, disciple new believers, and gather them into churches where they worship Jesus Christ and obey all he commanded. It is important to note that not every command of Christ, nor everything Christians do, is part of the church's mission.

The church is the one institution which arises out of the redemptive as opposed to the created order. It belongs to the realm of salvific, not common grace.

“It is not her (i.e. the church’s) function to educate, or to farm, or to heal, or to pursue scientific investigations. The Spirit that is in her is a Spirit expressing Himself exclusively in witness and in life” (Boer 1975:231).

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), and God has entrusted the preaching and communication of that gospel-unto-salvation to the church, whose members are counted a “chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” for the purpose of “declaring the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). If the church doesn’t do these things no one else will. It is the church’s unique mandate to send out ambassadors who can preach, who exemplify core Christian truths, and who strive to create loving and well-taught New Testament-like churches among ethnic groups where there are, as yet, few, if any, such entities.

God has given specific “marching orders” to the church with respect to its interaction with the world. Mission agencies are meant to be the mere means by which the church does its job.

10.2. Model the apostle Paul in his missionary enterprise

The apostle Paul as an evangelist and church planter is the best prototype of missions in the NT. He is the defining paradigm for Christian missions. In fact, on five occasions he presents his own life and ministry as a model for others to follow.

Phil. 4:9, *“The things which you learned, received, heard, and saw in me: do these things, and the God of peace will be with.”*

See also 1 Cor. 4:16, 9:22; Phil. 3:17, 1 Thes. 1:6)

The nature of Paul’s missionary enterprise consisted of preaching the good news widely and indiscriminately, encouraging new believers, appointing elders, and writing letters to the newly established churches about the meaning of what had happened to them when they accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour, and the impact that should have on their daily lives. In other words, Paul’s ministry consisted of establishing local churches among the nations which would model the obedience of faith. Once he had done that he could declare about large tracts of the ever trouble-filled Balkans that *“I no longer have any room for work in these regions”* (Rom. 15:23).

The rest of this section merely elaborates some of these Pauline rules of practice.

In his classic book *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* Roland Allan states that “the secret of the apostle’s success in founding churches lay in the observance of principles which we can reduce to rules of practice” (Allan 1962:151). He describes these as intelligible teaching, manageable organization of the community of believers under local leaders, finances arranged so that the local church can manage independent of outside help, clear teaching about the Christian life and the responsibility Christians have for each other, the responsibility of the local church to administer the sacraments, discipline its members and train leaders, and recognizing the right of the local church to exercise each of the gifts of the spirit. **Allan 1962:151-152.**

10.3. Proclaim the Gospel clearly

Col. 4:3,4, “*Proclaim the mystery of Christ... pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should*” NIV.

Evangelism, the proclamation of the gospel of God’s grace, is foundational. After all, people, not their societies, are eternal.

For proclamation to be effective evangelists and missionaries must have clear-cut convictions about the gospel message itself. What they present must be “*in accord with sound doctrine*” (Ti. 2:1). They must be able to communicate these gospel essentials clearly and, if they are working cross-culturally, they must be able to do so in a foreign language and cultural framework. This means a lifelong commitment to mastering the local language and becoming bicultural, yet all the while staying within the parameters of NT spirituality.

Presenting the truth with cultural sensitivity, disassociated from obnoxious western cultural practices yet without sliding into syncretism, is not always easy, but the core truths of the gospel must be clearly presented, taught, shared, gossiped... and lived in a way that is “imitatable” by the host community.

Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals who we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. **C.S. Lewis 1973:15.**

10.4. Live a transformed, ‘imitatable’ life consistent with the message preached

Eph. 4:1, “*Walk worthily of the calling with which you were called.*”

Christians are called to be recreated into Christ’s image (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10). In him we see what it means to live in the fullness of the Spirit. In him we see what a human being can look like whose life fully

displays the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

This is what God wants for people, and this is what Jesus' specific instructions to his disciples were about: they were to bear witness to everything he had taught and accomplished through his death and resurrection. They were to be heralds and models of the gospel of God's saving power and life-transforming grace in Jesus Christ.

What is written or preached is of little import if it is not first lived in such a way that the type of lives we live are within reach of those to whom we minister. Our lifestyles must be 'imitatable' in the sense that people who come to faith should be able to realistically hope that, one day, their lives are not hugely different from that of the Christians living among them.

People who show an interest in the gospel begin to notice and evaluate the lives of Christians. Hence spiritual values must not just be taught but also be demonstrated in ways understood by one's neighbours.

Being a theologian means being a teacher whose life is carefully observed. Piety and the intellect are united. Thus theological education... is not simply a transferring of knowledge, but also the emulation of exemplary teachers. **Meral 2005:212**

10.5. Focus on building up a local church

1 Cor. 14:12, "*Excel in gifts that build up the church.*" (NIV)

The pattern of church growth in the NT is simple: people converted and were organized into local assemblies which grew and matured under the tutelage of mature missionaries and/or local leaders into fully independent, self-replicating churches.

The importance of establishing congregations of believers is paramount. New believers need the caring support of a group of people who have also experienced some of the intimidation, threats, ostracism and even physical danger to enable them to stand firm in the faith.

Any ministry which does not seek to draw new converts into fellowship with the children of God must be eschewed.

10.6. Expect opposition

Phil. 1:12, "*Now I desire to have you know, brothers, that the things which happened to me have turned out rather to the progress of the Good News.*"

The NT emphasizes the reality of suffering for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

The main connection between missions and suffering in the NT is that those who take Jesus' missionary commands seriously may be sure of facing opposition in a world which rejected Christ, and where Satan is active. Christ stated this in no uncertain terms.

John 15:18-20, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, since I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his lord.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

This is what Paul refers to when he lists all the things he suffered in the course of his ministry (2 Cor. 11:23-27), when he speaks of "the suffering of Christ flowing over into our lives" (2 Cor. 1:5), of his "participation in Christ's sufferings" (Phil. 3:10-11), of "carrying in our body the death of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:10), and of "filling in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's affliction" (Col. 1:24).

"Suffering for the gospel" is a result of people's negative responses to the proclamation of the gospel message:

2 Tim. 1:8, 12, "Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace... And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am."

10.7. Disciple, train and relinquish responsibility

Mat. 28:19, "Go and make disciples."

Titus 1:5, "Appoint elders in every city."

From among those who come to faith key individuals must be disciplined to move towards the goal of establishing a church with mature national eldership able to introduce Christianity to society at large.

The apostle Paul was dedicated not simply to evangelism, and certainly not to becoming the minister of a congregation himself, but to the training of a mature national leadership.

Thus missions must focus sharply on the discipling of national believers who will give leadership to the indigenous church. Informal but time-consuming one-on-one discipleship and/or more formal training programs must equip potential church leaders for preaching, teaching and counselling. Once again, the importance of modelling these qualities in a way that is imitable cannot be overstated; theology becomes convincing when it is lived even more than when it makes sense.

“If we believe that the church is merely a voluntary society of people with shared values, then it is entirely optional. If the church helps you with your personal relationship with God, great; if not, I know a great brunch place that’s open on Sunday.

But while an individual relationship with Jesus is an important part of the Christian life, it is not the sum total of the Christian life. Our relationship with God is never less than an intimate relationship with Christ, but it is always more than that. Christians throughout history—Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox alike—have confessed that it is impossible to have a relationship with Christ outside of a vital relationship with the church, Christ’s body and bride. In his *Institutes*, John Calvin quotes Cyprian’s famous dictum (drawing on Paul’s language in Galatians 4) that “He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.”

When we confess in the Nicene Creed that we believe in “One holy, catholic, apostolic church,” we are confessing that we cannot know Christ on our own, or merely with a small cadre of our friends. Instead, we rely on the global, historic church that Christ initiated and built. When we worship Jesus, we rely on millions of Christians over thousands of years whom God has used to bear witness to himself.

Tish Harrison Warren, 2016. *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, p. 118.

XVII

Eschatology: The Doctrine of the End Times and the Hereafter

“The nations were angry, and your wrath came, as did the time for the dead to be judged, and to give your bondservants the prophets, their reward, as well as to the saints, and those who fear your name, to the small and the great; and to destroy those who destroy the earth” (Rev. 11:18).



1. Why does the doctrine of Eschatology matter?

1.1. The importance of having a sense of the future

There are many faithful Christians who become disappointed with their lives as they get older; they imagine that they don't have a future anymore. Often this sense of “no more future” derives from the fact that their lives did not pan out the way they had hoped due to circumstances or wrong decisions. They begin to wonder if God was really with them.

Much of this kind of distress comes from the failure to realize that life in all its fullness is still ahead of them. What matters with respect to the future is not age or health, but whether you have become the type of person who will “fit” into the world to come.

To be able to live a full-orbed Christian life in God's kingdom we need to have a strong sense of what the future will be like. We have to be able to make sense of it. We have to be able to see it clearly and plan for it with joyful anticipation.

For human beings to derive meaning from life they need to have a sense that the future is moving towards something ultimately purposeful. A sense of meaning is not a luxury. It is like spiritual oxygen for the soul. Anything that is perceived as having no future is perceived as meaningless.

A clear sense of the future, of what is ahead, gives us the larger context, which enables us to give the right shape to our lives here and now.

By understanding what the future holds we can be greatly strengthened in the present, for only then does our current life take on meaning, and we are able to make choices that agree with that reality. In other words, for Christians the meaning of the present life is largely a matter of what comes later.

The Bible's view of history is full of hope when compared to other world views. The human race is not on some kind of endless, repetitive journey. History is not cyclical; it is moving towards a climax.

Once an old missionary returned home after a lifetime spent in Africa on the same boat as Teddy Roosevelt, who was returning from a big-game hunting trip. Upon arrival in New York Harbour, Roosevelt received a big reception, but no one was waiting to welcome the missionary and his wife. The man felt embittered, so much so that his wife eventually told him to go have dealings with the Lord about the matter. The man locked himself in his room and poured out his heart to God. When he reappeared he was transformed. Amazed, his wife asked him what had happened. "I suddenly realized that we haven't arrived home yet," the man responded joyfully!

1.2. Note, however, that the continued existence of mankind is not primarily for our benefit, but for God's

We don't continue to exist because we would like to, but because God wants us to. He has made a great investment in individual human beings, as well as in corporate humanity. He considers this investment well worth the effort, and he is not going to lose the result of that effort by allowing human beings to cease to exist.

Isa. 53:10-11, "*He will see the travail of his soul and be satisfied.*" (AV)

Thus we will continue to exist because it pleases God. He treasures those whom he has created, planned for, longed for, sorrowed over, redeemed, adopted and befriended. Given these realities it would be unreasonable to think that we would stop to exist.

A human life resembles the opening words of an unfinished sentence, paragraph, chapter or book. We cannot know what they mean until we know what comes later. That is why people are always wondering about the meaning of historical events, or even of history itself. Meaning, when found, is found in the larger context.

2. What does the future look like?

2.1. The OT vision of the world to come

- a. All of humanity will meet before the divine presence on earth to delight in God and worship him.

The OT prophets foresaw the power of God's personal, direct presence bringing into being ideal governance in a way that human government had proved incapable of doing.

In this new Jerusalem all kinds of different ethnic groups will come together to see God in his glory.

Isa. 66:18, "For I know their works and their thoughts. The time comes that I will gather all nations and languages, and they will come, and will see my glory."

The OT prophets foresaw a day when what is right in the mind of God would be done as a simple matter of course.

Jer. 31:33, "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

See also Heb. 8:10; 10:16.

This project is seen as being fulfilled in two stages:

1. God's effective will reaching into people's lives now (his Kingdom among us) as a result of the Messiah's first coming

Jer. 31:33, "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people"

Ezek. 11:19-20, "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

Ezek. 36:26-28, "I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my ordinances, and do them. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God."

2. The time when “every knee will bow” at the Messiah’s second coming

Is. 45:23-25, “Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by myself. The word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and will not be revoked, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. They will say of me, ‘There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh.’ Even to him shall men come; and all those who raged against him shall be disappointed. All the offspring of Israel will be justified in Yahweh, and will rejoice!”

There will come a day when we will not be able to understand why anyone would want to engage in evil. That is the nature of God’s full reign. All the instruments of brutality that human governments now employ to manage a corrupt and unruly humanity will be put aside.

b. The OT prophets paint a gentle picture of the Messiah’s coming world government

The divine presence will replace the brute power of human beings who are alienated from God.

Isa. 2:4 (also Mic. 4:3), “He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” (NIV)

Isa. 24:23, “The moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for Yahweh of Armies will reign on Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem; and before his elders will be glory.”

Isa. 65:17-25, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying. No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be thought accursed. They will build houses and inhabit them; they will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not build and another inhabit, they will not plant and another eat; for as the lifetime of a tree, so will be the days of My people, and My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands. They will not labor in vain, or bear children for

ESCHATOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF THE END TIMES AND THE HEREAFTER

calamity; for they are the offspring of those blessed by the LORD, and their descendants with them. It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent's food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain," says the LORD."

Ezek. 37:24-28, "My servant David shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my ordinances, and observe my statutes, and do them. They shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob my servant, in which your fathers lived; and they shall dwell therein, they, and their children, and their children's children, forever: and David my servant shall be their prince forever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forever more. My tent also shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. The nations shall know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary shall be among them forever more."

Zech. 14:9, 16, "Yahweh will be King over all the earth. In that day Yahweh will be one, and his name one... It will happen that everyone who is left of all the nations that came against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, Yahweh of Armies, and to keep the feast of tents."

See also Isa. 62.

Just as the presence of a good person can touch, influence and may even govern people in their sphere of influence by the respect they inspire, so Christ's presence will transform people.

2.2. NT vision of the world to come

a. Christ will return to complete his work of redemption and establish his eschatological kingdom

The Kingdom of God now has already been vindicated with power by Jesus. Sin has been dealt with and he has all authority in heaven and on earth now.

Mat. 28:18, "Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."

Heb. 1:3, "His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purified us of our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Heb. 7:27, "He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." (NIV)

See also Heb. 10:10-14

However, the fullness of all Jesus has already accomplished will be fully revealed and completed when he comes again. The end will come after he has destroyed all rival dominion and authority.

1 Cor 15:22-25, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then those who are Christ's, at his coming. Then the end comes, when he will deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when he will have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."

Heb. 10:10-14, "When he (Christ) had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; from that time waiting until his enemies are made the footstool of his feet."

The world, infected by sin, will be renewed. There will be a new heaven and a new earth.

2 Pet. 3:10-13, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore since all these things will be destroyed like this, what kind of people ought you to be in holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, which will cause the burning heavens to be dissolved, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."

See also Rom 8:18-25;

b. The new era will start with Christ's judgment of all humanity

God the Father has given all authority to judge over to Jesus the Son. When Jesus returns every person who has lived in the whole of human history will face him, the righteous judge.

Jn. 5:27-30, "He (God) also gave him (Jesus Christ) authority to execute judgment, because he is the son of man. Do not marvel at this, for the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice, and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is righteous; because I do not seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me."

Jesus himself vividly described this moment in the history of humanity with the picture of the shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats in Mat. 25:31-46.

ESCHATOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF THE END TIMES AND THE HEREAFTER

In short, the certainty of a coming day of judgment is taught throughout the NT.

Jesus taught it (Mat 10:15; 11:22-24; Mat. 12:36; Mat. 25:31-46)

Paul taught it (Ac. 17: 30-31; Rom. 2:5; 2 Thes. 1:5-10).

James taught it (Jam. 5:7-9).

Peter taught it (1 Pet. 2:12; 2 Pet. 2:9; 3:7, 10).

John taught it (1 Jn. 4:17; Rev. 20:11-15).

The writer of Hebrews taught it (Heb. 9:27; 10:27)

c. Christ will carry out two separate judgments: (1) that of unbelievers and (2) that of believers

Rev. 11:18, *"The nations were angry, and your wrath came, as did the time for (1) the dead to be judged, and (2) to give your bondservants the prophets, their reward, as well as to the saints, and those who fear your name, to the small and the great; and (1) to destroy those who destroy the earth."*

i. The judgment of all people

Dan. 12:2, *"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."*

Mat. 25:31-33, Parable of the sheep and the goats

Rev. 20:11-15, *"I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire."*

Col. 3:25, *"But he who does wrong will receive again for the wrong that he has done, and there is no partiality."*

ii. The judgment of believers

The judgment of believers is not a judgment of condemnation!

Rom. 8:1, *"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

Jn. 5:24, *"Most certainly I tell you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."*

The judgment of believers is to reward those who have served Jesus faithfully.

See Mat. 25:31-46, parable of the sheep and the goats

Rom. 14:10, 12, *"But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.... So then each one of us will give account of himself to God."*

2 Cor. 5:10, *"For we must all be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."*

1 Cor. 3:8, 13-15, people's works will be judged as to whether they are gold, silver, wood, or hay...

1 Cor. 4:5, *"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each man will get his praise from God."*

d. In the future you will still be you

To the thief on the cross Jesus said, *"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise"* (Lk.23:43). This statement would be false if it meant that the thief was anything less than himself, in good shape and in a wonderful place.

We will not lose our personal sense of who we are, and all our knowledge of and relationships with other people will remain intact.

The life we now have as persons will continue, and will do so in the universe in which we now exist. We will still be embodied creatures, but in a body like that of Jesus after his resurrection.

The risen Christ has a body! But it is radiant, spiritual kind of body. Paul called it *"his glorious body"* (Phil. 3:31). It is not restrained by space, time or physical cause and effect the way our current bodies are. Paul tries to describe the transformation of the body as follows: *"it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body"* (1 Cor. 15:44).

The description of what this “spiritual body” looks like is based on the experience of the earliest Christians with the risen Christ. This was the bedrock of their confidence with respect to their own futures.

Phil. 3:20-21, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself.”

Paul tells the Corinthians that when our “earthly tent” is torn down we are not deprived of a body any more than Jesus was. Instead, we are “clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling” and not “found naked” (2 Cor. 5).

We will be gloriously embodied beings! We shall be “like the angels” who stand before the throne of God and gaze upon him in wonder and awe.

Lk. 20:35-36, “But those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage. For they cannot die any more, for they are like the angels, and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.”

Heb. 12: 22-24, “But you have come... to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.” (NIV)

e. We will be in a place where we will “really know” and be “really known”

Our experience of reality will be much clearer, richer and deeper because it will be unrestrained by the limitations imposed by our current limited and degenerating bodies. Hence it will be a place where we will “really know”. Now we know things in distorted fashion, as through a poor quality, first-century mirror.

1 Cor. 13:12, “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known.”

In other words, now our awareness of reality is distorted, like that of little children who only have limited ideas on how the world actually functions. But when we move through death we shall “know fully, as I have been fully known”. In our glorious bodies we will have the same kind of fullness and clarity of experience as other heavenly beings possess.

There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed on the day of judgment.

Lk. 12:2-3, *"But there is nothing covered up, that will not be revealed, nor hidden, that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light. What you have spoken in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops."*

Are we ready for this kind of transparency?

f. Heaven will be a happy place

Paul's glorious account in 1 Cor. 15 of the defeat of death uses OT imagery:

Verse 25 = Psa. 110:1, *The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."*

Verse 27 = Psa. 8:6, *You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.*

Verse 54 = Isa. 25:8, *he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.*

Verse 55 = Hos. 13:14, *"I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?"*

Jesus' message of "the kingdom of heaven" included a future fullness of everlasting happiness and enjoyment of life in God which far transcends that which earth in its present form has to offer.

When discussing his own death Jesus said to his friends, *"If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father!"* (Jn. 14:28). He wasn't grieving!

To the thief on the cross he said, *"Assuredly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."* (Lk. 23:43). That is the understanding of the NT as a whole. The NT writers recognized that they are better off 'dead' from the human point of view.

Phil. 1:21-24, *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will bring fruit from my work; yet I do not know what I will choose. But I am in a dilemma between the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Yet, to remain in the flesh is more needful for your sake."*

2 Cor. 5:8, *"I would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."* (NIV)

ESCHATOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF THE END TIMES AND THE HEREAFTER

We will one day “*enter into the joy of our Lord*” (Mat. 25:11).

g. It will be a place where God will entrust us with new responsibilities

After death we will not be sitting around looking at each other or at God for eternity, but will “reign with him” in God’s endlessly creative work. That is what we were created for.

Rev. 5:10, “*You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.*” Fulfilling Exod. 19:6, “*You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*” (NIV)

Lk. 19:17, “*He said to him, ‘Well done, you good servant! Because you were found faithful with very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’*”

Mat. 25:21, “*His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’*”

How many cities could you govern under God today? How would things turn out if he granted you the power to do with it as you wanted? An honest answer might reveal that much still needs to be done in your life before you are ready to assume your future responsibilities. Very few of those who want to rule are actually capable of it.

We should not, however, think of heaven as a place peopled by myriads of celestial bureaucrats. That would be no better than being caught up in an endless church service!

No, it will be a tremendously creative team effort with unimaginably splendid leadership on an inconceivably vast plane of activity, with wonderful cycles of productivity and enjoyment.

1 Cor. 2:9, “*But as it is written, ‘Things which an eye did not see, and an ear did not hear, which did not enter into the heart of man, these God has prepared for those who love him.’*”

3. Will the afterlife consist of heaven or a renewed earth?

Will we go to heaven (as a totally new dimension) or to a renewed earth after death?

3.1. The focus of both the OT and NT seems to be a new heaven and a new earth

See Isa. 11; 65:13-25; Micah 4;

Eph. 1:9-10, *“He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”* (NIV)

Rev. 21:1, *“I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more.”*

3.2. The three systems of eschatological interpretation

a. Premillennialism

Premillennialism holds that at the end of history as we know it Christ will return bodily to earth to physically establish his millennial kingdom. During this time Satan will be bound and the world will experience a millennium of peace and prosperity (Rev. 20:1-4). This millennium, though not permanent, is the first phase of Christ’s rule. At the end of this period there will be a final rebellion, ending in final judgment (Rev. 20:7-15), after which history will enter a new phase altogether: there will be a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21).

During the period immediately prior to Christ’s coming the earth will go through a period of great tribulation. Some premillennialists hold that the church will be delivered from this tribulation (pre-trib premillennialism), others hold that the church will only experience part of this tribulation (mid-trib premillennialism) and others hold that the church will go through all of it (post-trib premillennialism). The latter view is also known as historic premillennialism, as it was the position commonly held by the early church.

This view interprets the prophetic visions of Isaiah and Micah, as well as Rev. 20, most literally.

b. Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism holds that as a result of the influence of missionary activities of the church society will become progressively better, to eventually ease into the millennial kingdom.

This was a commonly held position in the 19th century, a century of great social and scientific progress and Protestant missionary activity. Premillennialism, however, virtually died in the trenches of World War I, during which time Protestant (Lutheran) Germany and Protestant (Anglican) Britain fought the bloodiest conflict of all time. There are very few people who still hold to this position.

c. Amillennialism

Amillennialism holds that Christ's present sovereign reign in this, the church age, is equivalent to the millennial kingdom described in the Bible. It rejects the idea of a future literal, physical millennial kingdom on earth under Christ's reign, and spiritualizes it instead.

Amillennialism assumes that unfulfilled prophecy in the Bible is written in figurative or symbolic language which should not be taken literally. Within Protestantism this position is most common in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

4. Where do believers go after they die and before Christ comes back?

The Bible does not give a great amount of detail regarding the intermediate state. There are, however, a few verses that allude to it.

- To "Paradise" according to Jesus' statement to the thief on the cross (Lk. 23:43).
- To "Abraham's side" according to Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Lk. 16:23).
- "Under the altar"

Rev. 6:9, "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed for the Word of God, and for the testimony of the Lamb which they had."

In this verse John is given a vision of those who will be killed because of their faith during the end times. They are situated "under God's altar" in heaven and described as souls. The verse suggests that believers currently in heaven are in a spiritual/non-corporeal form until the resurrection, yet able to experience the immediate, conscious enjoyment of God.

5. What relationship is there between our service for Christ in this life and in the next?

As Christ's disciples, God's plan for us is to develop to the point where we assume our responsibilities in his ongoing creative acts. Hence our faithfulness over a "few things" in the present matters very much, for it will impact the nature of our future responsibilities. The present helps develop the kind of character that God can entrust with "many things" in the future.

In other words, God's intention is that we become the kind of person who can freely participate in God's reign and rule. For that to happen our character and the inner direction of our selves must be developed to the point where God can entrust us with his purposes.

God will reward those who faithfully serve him in the here-and-now.

1 Cor. 3:10 ff speaks of gold, silver, stones as the raw material to work with, like the talents in Jesus' parables.

Note too the climax of Jesus' parable about the nature of the kingdom: "*Then shall the good shine brilliantly, like the sun, in the kingdom of their father*" (Mat. 13:43, quoting Dan. 12:3).

6. How should the doctrine of heaven motivate us?

6.1. To holiness of life

2 Cor. 7:1, "Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

2 Pet. 3:11-14, "Therefore since all these things will be destroyed like this, what kind of people ought you to be in holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, which will cause the burning heavens to be dissolved, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, seeing that you look for these things, be diligent to be found in peace, without defect and blameless in his sight."

1 Jn. 3:2-3, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is. Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure."

6.2. To be less concerned about material possessions

Mat. 6:19-21, 33, "Do not lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves do not break through and steal, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well."

Col. 3:1-4, "If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on

ESCHATOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF THE END TIMES AND THE HEREAFTER

the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, our life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory."

6.3. To be less concerned about temporal problems

2 Cor. 4:17 – 5:2, "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if the earthly house of our tent is dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens. For most certainly in this we groan, longing to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven."

6.4. To help withstand persecution

1 Cor. 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

See also Phil. 1:20-29.

6.5. To give hope

Eph. 2:11-13, "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world... BUT NOW..." etc.

6.6. To cope with bereavement

1 Thes. 4:13, "But we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you do not grieve like the rest, who have no hope."

6.7. To meet our own death with courage

Phil. 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

2 Tim. 4:6-8, "For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. From now on, there is stored up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing."

7. **Who will benefit in the future?**

People from every tribe and tongue and nation.

Jn. 14:2-3, *"In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also."*

In Revelation the phrase *"every nation and tribe and tongue and people"* becomes a refrain with respect to God's redemptive purposes for the earth.

The future will be for the benefit of all of mankind in a corporate sense.

Mat. 12:18-21 (quoting Isa. 42:1-4), *"Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope."* (NIV)

The prophetic words of Isaiah will be fulfilled.

Isa. 66:19-23, *"I will set a sign among them, and I will send those who escape of them to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to far-away islands, who have not heard my fame, nor have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations. They shall bring all your brothers out of all the nations for an offering to Yahweh, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules, and on camels, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says Yahweh, as the children of Israel bring their offering in a clean vessel into Yahweh's house. Of them I will also select priests and Levites," says Yahweh. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me," says Yahweh, "so your offspring and your name shall remain. It shall happen that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh will come to worship before me," says Yahweh."*

8. What will be the signs of the end of the age?

Many theories about the end of the world are based on the parallel passages in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. This discourse of the Lord Jesus follows his comment about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and a related question from his disciples. Jesus here refers to both the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in A.D. 70, and the end of the world.

There are basically two ways of understanding this discourse: as two layers superimposed on each other, or as two consecutive sections.

8.1. Matthew 24 as two layers superimposed on each other:

This enables you to identify four signs that the end of the world is near:

ESCHATOLOGY: THE DOCTRINE OF THE END TIMES AND THE HEREAFTER

- 1) Faith in Jesus is replaced by faith in false teachings and false messiahs (Mat. 24:11-12, 22-23).
- 2) Persecution, as the gospel is preached to all nations (Mat. 24:9-14).
- 3) Wars and conflicts surrounding Jerusalem and between the nations of the world (Mat. 24:6-7).
- 4) Disturbances in the natural world (Mat. 24:29).

8.2. Matthew 24 as two consecutive sections:

This leads you to be more influenced by Mat. 24:36-51 and 25:1-13 with their emphasis on the suddenness of Jesus' coming.

- 1) You will see Mat. 24:4-6 as a warning not to be misled by signs, because these things happen regularly throughout history.
- 2) You will see Mat. 24:26-28 as a warning not to be misled by other people because when Christ comes it will be obvious to all. He will be seen by everyone.

8.3. Warnings from history

From the time that Jesus returned to heaven Christians have looked for signs that would indicate that his return was about to happen.

At various times Christians expected Jesus to return in their lifetime. In the twentieth century, for instance, Christians saw a succession of signs that the end of the world was near: the First and Second World Wars, the return of the Jews to re-establish the nation of Israel, the threat of nuclear war and the approach of the year 2000. It is a sobering thought to realise they were wrong.

In its original context in Mat. 16:3 the phrase "the signs of the times" does not refer to the end of the world, but to the first coming of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

- a. Mat. 24 and related scriptures give us signs and indications pertaining to Christ's second coming, so it is not wrong to watch for them. At the same time, we should be very careful about making dogmatic statements on the subject of the end of the world by looking at current events. Both history and the teaching of the Bible show us that this kind of speculation is fruitless.

Mat. 24:36, "*But no one knows of that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*"

Ac. 1:7, "*It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has set within his own authority.*"

- b. Our confidence as Christians is not in human ideas and calculations but in the sovereign God. *“With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day”* (2 Pet. 3:8).
- c. The Bible’s teaching on the end times emphasises behaviour.

We are expected to live in the light of the knowledge that Jesus is coming back.

See Matt. 24:36 - 25:46; 2 Pet. 3:1-14.

What really matters is how we live here and now in the light of the fact that God’s judgments are abroad in history and that Christ is coming again in glory. The question of the precise time is not primary. What is primary is how this relates to my life and my conduct today.

2 Tim. 4:1-2, “I command you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his Kingdom: preach the word; be urgent in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all patience and teaching.”

2 Pet. 3:11-12 “Therefore since all these things will be destroyed like this, what kind of people ought you to be in holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, which will cause the burning heavens to be dissolved, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?”

Appendix I

What is “The New Perspective on Paul”?



The “new perspective on Paul” maintains that Paul has been misunderstood since the time of Augustine.⁵⁰ Two of its three best-known advocates, E. P. Sanders and James D. G. Dunn, do not consider themselves as evangelicals. The third, N.T. Wright, does and is accepted as such by many. His presentation of the New Perspective in *What St. Paul Really Said* (1997) led to great debate and confusion within evangelical denominations and theological institutions. It is Wright’s version of the New Perspective which we focus on.

In essence the New Perspective holds that second-temple Judaism (i.e., the type of Judaism which existed in Palestine during the first century) has been misconstrued, and as a result Paul’s teaching in Romans and Galatians with respect to justification is misunderstood. According to Wright the traditional Protestant understanding of justification “has systematically done violence to that text [i.e., the book of Romans] for hundreds of years.”⁵¹

1. The main tenets of the New Perspective

a. The idea that first century Judaism was a religion of legalistic self-justification is wrong

The Pharisees were not really legalists seeking to earn a right standing with God by means of keeping the law and doing good works. This notion is a result of Augustine and Luther’s reading of Galatians and Romans in the context of their own battles with Pelagius and Rome.

Instead of teaching salvation through human merit, 1st century Judaism emphasized God’s grace. Since 1st century Pharisees accepted a religion of divine, covenant grace there was no fundamental difference between them and Paul with respect to how one is accepted by God.

b. The root of Paul’s issue with the Judaizers had to do with the way they viewed and treated Gentiles

Paul’s issue with the Judaizers had to do with racial and cultural concerns, not soteriological ones. He was responding to their racial and national exclusivity as exemplified by such religious identity markers as circumcision and the dietary laws.⁵²

⁵⁰ Wright, N.T. 1997. *What Paul Really Said*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. p. 115.

⁵¹ Wright, N.T. 1997. P. 117.

⁵² Ibid, p. 120

In other words, Paul's great concern was to promote racial harmony and diversity within the new covenant community.

- c. Paul's actual gospel message was declaring that through his death and resurrection Jesus Christ proved himself to be lord and king over creation

The gospel is not about how individual sinners can escape the wrath of a just God through penal substitutionary atonement and enter into a personal relationship with him. It is, instead, a declaration of victory.⁵³

In other words, preaching the gospel message for Paul was not about declaring that people are guilty sinners who can be justified through faith in Christ's substitutionary atoning work, but about declaring that Jesus is Lord over all.

Thus by "the gospel" Paul does *not* mean "justification by faith." He means the announcement that the crucified and risen Jesus is Lord. To believe this message—to give believing allegiance to Jesus as Messiah and Lord—is to be justified in the present by faith (whether or not one has even heard of justification by faith). Justification by faith is a second-order doctrine: To believe it is both to have assurance (believing that one will be vindicated on the last day [Romans 5:1-5] and to know that one belongs in the single family of God, called to share table fellowship with all other believers without distinction [Galatians 2:11-21]).⁵⁴

- d. Paul's use of the term justification pertained primarily to ecclesiology, not soteriology

Justification "is not 'how you become a Christian,' so much as 'how you can tell who is a member of the covenant family'"⁵⁵. It pertains to the Gentiles' standing in the covenant community, and not to individual sinners' standing with God by receiving forgiveness based on Christ's atoning work.

"Justification" in the first century was not about how someone might establish a relationship with God. It was about God's eschatological definition, both future and present, of who was, in fact, a member of his people. In Sanders' terms, it was not so much about "getting in,"

⁵³ Ibid, p. 45, 47.

⁵⁴ Italics in original: <http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/04/05/the-shape-of-justification/> Nov. 28, 2017.

⁵⁵ Wright, N.T. *What Paul Really Said*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans, 1997. p. 122.

or indeed about "staying in," as about "how you could tell who was in." In standard Christian theological language, it wasn't so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church.⁵⁶

Any connection between justification and the individual believer's standing with God is in the context of the final judgement, when God will judge all men according to their works⁵⁷. In other words, the Christian's final standing before God will not be settled until the day of judgment, and is in part dependent on the believers' own works of righteousness. (See also point 2.a below.)

2. Problems with the New Perspective

Although proponents of the New Perspective affirm (some, like Wright, very vigorously) that they hold to historic Reformed Protestantism, historic Protestantism and the New Perspective are incompatible.

a. Wright's definition of justification is deeply flawed

As seen, Wright holds that justification is an ecclesiological or corporate issue, not a personal one. It has to do with the nature of the church. It pertains to opening up membership in the covenant community to all men everywhere:

Justification, in Galatians, is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their racial differences, as they together wait for the final new creation.⁵⁸

He then pushes the act of justification in the sense of being counted right with God to the day of judgment. Based on Romans 2:23, "*Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified*", he maintains that the believer's standing before God is in some ways dependent on Spirit-induced good works.

Why is there now "now condemnation"? Because, on the one hand, God has condemned sin in the flesh of Christ... and, on the other hand,

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 119.

⁵⁷ <http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/04/05/the-shape-of-justification/> (accessed Nov. 28, 2017).

See also <http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/new-perspectives-on-paul/>: "New Perspectives on Paul" Rutherford House Edinburgh, 10th Dogmatics Conference, 25-28 August 2003. (accessed Nov. 28, 2017).

⁵⁸ Wright, N.T. 1997. P. 122

because the Spirit is at work to do within believers what the Law could not do.⁵⁹

Although he rejects the idea that justification is a process, he maintains that, in effect, good works are not just evidence of true faith but foundational to salvation. Basing his argument on 1 Thes. 3:19, *For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?* he states that Paul, with respect to his own salvation, "looks ahead to the coming day of judgment and sees God's favourable verdict not on the basis of the merits and death of Christ... but on the basis of his apostolic work".⁶⁰

This is essentially the Roman Catholic idea of justification about which the Reformation was fought. If Wright is right then Luther was wrong. But Wright is not right.

Ac. 13:38-39, "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses." (NIV)

Rom. 4:4-5, "Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness." (NIV)

By denying that these classic verses for justification by faith alone (along with a great number of other, related passages on Christ's imputed righteousness, ex. 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:6; Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5; 1 Thes. 5:9, etc.), provide the basis for a right standing with God, Wright stands against the Reformers. Instead, he opens the way to understanding justification as a mixture of faith and sanctification. While the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) in Christ alone (*solus Christus*) is the framework from which the rest of Pauline teaching (and that of historic Protestantism) hangs, Wright does not think that it is one of the essential doctrines of Christianity. As seen, according to him justification is "a second-order doctrine".⁶¹

⁵⁹ "New Perspectives on Paul", Rutherford House, etc.

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ <http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/04/05/the-shape-of-justification/> (Nov. 28, 2017)

b. Wright's idea about "the works of the law" is deeply flawed

The historic Protestant position is that in such passages as Galatians 2:16, 3:10, Romans 9:32, 11:6, etc., Paul argues that the law condemns sinners and that their own efforts to obey it cannot save them. How else can one understand Romans 11:6: "*And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace*"?

According to proponents of the New Perspective, however, what Paul and 1st century Judaism in general meant by the law were the Jewish identity markers: circumcision, the dietary law, etc. Accordingly, Paul does not deny that good works play a role in justification.

However, our understanding of first-century Judaism should be shaped by the NT witness, not by the ideas of contemporary scholars who do not recognize the authority of the Scripture. Even if it were true that, in theory, Judaism recognized the grace of God as salvific, it was legalistic in practice. A simple NT example (one of many possibilities) is Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, which he addressed to "*those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous*". According to the New Perspective, however, this kind of self-righteousness wasn't a problem for Jesus or Paul. Wright is wrong to lend more credence to Sanders and Dunn than to the Scriptures. In doing so he violates that other great pillar of the Reformation, *sola Scriptura*.

Secondly, the idea of first century Judaism being a religion of grace and not of works has been debunked by numerous serious NT scholars (see for instance, D. A. Carson's *Justification and Variegated Nomism*).

Thirdly, Paul was not just declaiming Jewish identity markers such as circumcision and the dietary laws, he accused his fellow Jews of stealing, adultery, robbing temples and dishonoring God (Rom. 2:21-23) in order to make the point that their need for Christ's atoning sacrifice was as great as that of any Gentile: "*Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone*" (Rom. 9:31-32).

The *old* (i.e. New Testament) perspective of first-century Judaism is most certainly the correct one.

c. Wright's idea about the nature of God's righteousness is flawed

Wright maintains that Protestants have seriously misunderstood the phrase "the righteousness of God". According to him the phrase "God's righteousness" is a synonym for "his covenant faithfulness". In fact, he flatly denies the concept of imputed righteousness, thus rejecting the

doctrine that Christ righteousness is reckoned (imputed) to the sinner's account, and that it is only on the basis of Christ's righteousness that the sinner obtains a right standing before God. According to him righteousness is not "something that 'counts before God or 'avails with' God."⁶² It is not something God imparts or imputes to sinners.

"If we use the language of the law court," says Wright, "it makes no sense whatsoever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom."⁶³

"If we leave the notion of 'righteousness' as a law-court metaphor only, as so many have done in the past, this gives the impression of a legal transaction, a cold piece of business, almost a trick of thought performed by a God who is logical and correct but hardly one we would want to worship."⁶⁴

These are very strong rejections of Paul's teaching on justification by faith, i.e., that "God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom. 4:24).

To make his point Wright rewrites Phil. 3:9: "I, though possessing covenant membership according to the flesh, did not regard that covenant membership as something to exploit; I emptied myself, sharing the death of the Messiah; wherefore God has given me the membership that really counts, in which I too will share the glory of Christ."⁶⁵

The passage actually states the exact opposite! "*What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*" (Phil 3:8-9 NIV)

Gresham Machen said it well back in 1921, "Paul is devoted to justification by faith not because he is devoted to Gentile mission; rather he is devoted to Gentile mission because justification by faith is true."⁶⁶

⁶² NT Wright, 1997. p.102.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 98.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 98.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 124.

⁶⁶ Machen, G. 2013 (original in 1921). *The Origins of Paul's Religion*. The Floating Press, Auckland. p. 301.

d. Wright's idea that the proclamation of the gospel consists of declaring the kingship of Jesus is flawed

As seen, the gospel according to the New Perspective is a declaration of the kingship of Christ, not the good news as always understood in conservative Protestantism, that Christ's penal substitutionary atonement satisfied the demands of God, that Christ's righteousness was imputed to sinners, and that the subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit leads to a transformation of life.

The kingship of Christ is, of course, an important aspect of NT teaching. Christians accept Jesus as Saviour *and* Lord. But to suggest that the essential nature of the gospel message is not a message of personal redemption from sin through Christ's penal substitutionary atonement but, instead, a mere declaration of Christ's lordship, is a radical revision indeed. It also opens the way to the widest possible ecumenical cooperation. Wright is, in fact, upfront about his ecumenical motives: "the doctrine of justification is in fact the great *ecumenical* doctrine"⁶⁷, and those who regard it as the fundamental issue standing in the way of Protestant and Roman Catholic reconciliation "have turned the doctrine into its opposite."

Conclusion

Although the New Perspective holds that Augustine, Luther and the other Reformers were driven by the issues of their own time when exegeting the NT, the truth is that New Perspective proponents themselves seem driven by contemporary notions of inclusivism, ecumenicalism, anti-individualism, and a post-modern questioning of certainty and assurance.

Why so many contemporary evangelicals have been seduced by this false teaching is a mystery, but it is corroding the foundations of Pauline and Reformation teachings on how to enter into a right relationship with God.

This paragraph from the American theologian David Wells sums up what the Lord Jesus Christ achieved on the Cross:

Man is alienated from God by sin and God is alienated from man by wrath. It is in the substitutionary death of Christ that sin is overcome and wrath averted, so that God can look on man without displeasure and man can look on God without fear. Sin is expiated and God is propitiated.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 158

⁶⁸ David Wells. 1978. *Search for Salvation*. Leicester: IVP, page 29.

Appendix 2

Four Frameworks of Bible Interpretation



Here we look at four different frameworks through which different Protestant traditions view the Bible as a whole, notably Dispensationalism, Hyper-dispensationalism, Covenant Theology and New Covenant Theology.

1. Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is a framework for interpreting the Bible which divides God's way of dealing with mankind into different periods (dispensations) of time. It teaches that in each dispensation God chose to relate to the world according to specific criteria unique to that age. In other words, in each successive dispensation God dealt with his creation in a new way. There is major discontinuity between the dispensations. Once an old dispensation is over and a new one begun, the "old" way of doing things is superseded by the criteria of the new dispensation.

Dispensations generally follow a specific pattern: (1) God gives people a responsibility or commands. (2) The people fail or disobey. (3) Divine judgment follows. (4) God establishes a new dispensation with new criteria as the basis upon which he now deals with people.

Dispensationalists usually speak of seven such periods (though some speak of three, others of nine, some even of thirty-seven!). We limit ourselves to the most commonly held position of seven dispensations.

1.1. The Dispensation of Innocence (Gen. 1:28-30 and 2:15-17)

This covers the period of Adam and Eve prior to the fall. God's commands were to (1) fill the earth with people, (2) subdue the earth, (3) have dominion over the animals, (4) care for the garden, and (5) abstain from eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

God warned that physical and spiritual death would result from disobedience.

It ended with Adam and Eve's disobedience when they ate the forbidden fruit. Judgment consisted of death and expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

1.2. The Dispensation of Conscience (Gen. 3:8-8:22)

This dispensation lasted from the fall into sin until Noah's flood. During this period mankind demonstrated how low it would stoop if left to its own sinful nature, will and conscience.

The five major aspects of this dispensation are: (1) a curse on the serpent, (2) a change in womanhood and childbearing, (3) the curse on nature, (4) the imposition of difficult labour to produce food, and (5) the promise of Christ as the seed who will bruise the serpent's head (Satan).

This era ended in the judgment of Noah's flood.

1.3. The Dispensation of Human Government (Gen. 8:22-11)

It consists of God's commands to Noah and his family. They were to repopulate the earth and have dominion over the animal world. Capital punishment was established to help maintain order. God also promised that there would never be another flood. The sign of God's promise was the rainbow.

However, Noah's descendants were disobedient: they did not scatter and fill the earth as God had commanded. Instead, they began building a tower to create solidarity and "one-world government", so God punished them by confusing their languages. This brought the construction of the Tower of Babel to a halt and forced them to obey God's command to "fill the earth". As a result different nations and cultures arose, and human government has been a reality ever since.

1.4. The Dispensation of Promise (Gen. 12-Ex. 19:25)

This period started with the call of Abraham, continued through the lives of the patriarchs, and ended with the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. During this dispensation God called his chosen people, the Jews, into existence.

The basic promises of the Dispensation of Promise were: (1) Abraham would become the father of a great nation which God would bless with natural and spiritual prosperity, (2) Abraham's name would become great, (3) those who blessed his descendants would be blessed, and those who cursed them would be cursed, and (4) through Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed (something eventually fulfilled in Jesus Christ).

The sign of this dispensation was circumcision, and it pertains only to the Jewish people.

Based on this Dispensation of Promise, dispensational theology teaches that there would be two distinct peoples of God: Israel and the church.

It holds that the church has not replaced Israel in God's program and that the OT promises to Israel have not been transferred to the church. Instead, it holds that in the future God will again focus his attention on Israel. His OT promises to Israel (for land, many descendants, and blessings) will, eventually, be fulfilled during the 1000-year period spoken of in Revelation 20 (i.e., the millennium).

1.5. The Dispensation of Law (Exodus until Pentecost)

During the Dispensation of Law God dealt with the Jewish nation on the basis of the Mosaic Law, as given in the Torah. It involved temple worship led by priests, a sacrificial system, a moral code, and ongoing divine communication through the prophets.

As a result of disobedience to the Mosaic Law, Israel lost the Promised Land and was subjected to bondage.

Note: *At Pentecost the Dispensation of Law was suspended – but not ended.* It will be re-imposed again upon Christ's physical return to earth and continue during the millennium, though with some modifications.

1.6. The Dispensation of Grace (Pentecost to 2nd coming of Christ)

This is the "Age of Grace" or the "Church Age". It started at Pentecost and will end with the rapture of the church, when all born-again believers are taken up to heaven to be with Christ. It is worldwide, encompassing both Jews and the Gentiles.

Man's responsibility during this era is to accept Jesus, God's Son, as Lord and Saviour. During this dispensation the Holy Spirit indwells believers. Eventually the church will be raptured, after which there will be seven years of tribulations during which many more Jews will turn to Christ and become missionaries to the rest of the world.

Again, it is essential to remember with dispensational theology that there is a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church. They are two different entities with two different destinies. *The Church is seen as a "parenthesis" between God's dealings with national Israel. The restored kingdom promised to Israel will be fulfilled in the Millennium.* Until then we'll live the Dispensation of Grace: the time of the Gentiles.

1.7. The Millennial Kingdom of Christ (for 1000 years after 2nd coming of Christ)

It will start at Christ's second coming, at which time Christ will commence his rule on earth for 1000 years. During this dispensation the prophecies to the Jewish nation that the Christ (i.e., the Messiah) will return and be their King will be fulfilled.

Satan is bound during the 1000 years, at the end of which he will be released to lead a final rebellion. This will end with the final judgment (Rev. 20:11-14), when the old world will be destroyed by fire, and the New Heaven and New Earth of Revelation 21 and 22 will commence.

Summary: Dispensationalism is a theological system that makes a strong distinction between the way God deals with Israel and the way he deals with the church. It organizes the Bible into different eras, or dispensations, during each of which God deals with mankind in a unique way.

2. **Hyper- (or Ultra) dispensationalism (or "Grace Movement")**

Hyper-dispensationalism (or ultra-dispensationalism) was first promoted by an Anglican theologian called Ethelbert W. Bullinger (1837-1913). Various versions were or are held by the Berean Bible Society and such men as Cornelius Stam, Otis Sellers, A.E. Knoch, J.C. O'Hair, Charles Baker and Douglas Stauffer. In the USA hyper-dispensationalists tend to refer to themselves as the Grace Movement.

Hyper-dispensationalism extends the Dispensation of Law past Pentecost. In other words, it holds that the Dispensation of Grace with respect to the Gentile church did not begin at Pentecost but either soon after Paul's conversion in Ac. 9 or in Ac. 13:46, when Paul told the Jews of Pisidian Antioch who rejected his message, "*Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.*" This is sometimes called "mid-Acts dispensationalism".

Extreme hyper-dispensationalists hold that the new dispensation of grace did not begin until the end of the book of Acts, where Paul states to the Jews in Rome, "*Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen*" (Ac. 28:28). This is sometimes called "post-Acts dispensationalism".

Hyper-dispensationalists hold that Jesus' teaching was only for the Jews, and consisted of the basis on which he would have instituted his kingdom had they accepted it. After they rejected him, the Jewish people were given a second chance to embrace Jesus' kingdom through the preaching and ministry of the twelve apostles, who continued teaching Jesus' "Hebrew gospel" of faith + law after his ascension, and in so doing established a distinctly "Hebrew" church in the process.

When the Jewish nation finally rejected the apostles' message of Christ's kingdom, the offer was withdrawn. In other words, according to the hyper-dispensationalists the other apostles – and according to some even Paul himself early in his career – were dealing with a Hebrew church which was different from the Gentile “mystery” church revealed to Paul. The Gentile church which Paul eventually founded was based on a gospel of pure grace.

A hyper-dispensationalist interpretation of the Bible leads to the following conclusions:

2.1. The four Gospels are for Jews only and have no bearing on the church

Refutation:

Some of the Gospels were written later in church history. For instance, the majority of scholars hold that John was written around 90 A.D., well after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and long after Paul had been martyred in the latter part of the 60s A.D.

Luke and Acts (obviously written after Paul's ministry) were addressed to a Greek (Gentile) believer, Theophilus.

Jesus predicted the destruction of the Jewish nation, meaning that neither he nor the apostles were likely to bother founding a special Hebrew church they knew would be short-lived.

Lk. 21:24, “They (the Jews) will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

As early as Ac. 2:40 Peter encourages the early church to “*be saved from this perverse generation*”. Why would he do so if he hoped that Israel would soon accept the offer of Christ's kingdom which he was supposedly preaching?

2.2. The word church in large sections (or even all) of Acts is a euphemism which refers to the kingdom which Jesus preached in His gospel of faith + law.

According to hyperdispensationalism the word church in Acts does not stand for the same idea of church which Paul had, particularly when he wrote his prison epistles towards the end of his life. It refers to the “Hebrew Church”, which is really the kingdom which Jesus preached.

APPENDIX 2: FOUR FRAMEWORKS OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

Refutation:

Nowhere does Luke change the meaning of the word church in the middle of Acts. The church grew from the beginning as a mixed-race entity consisting of converted Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles.

Conversely, Paul himself preached about the kingdom of God in his epistles. There was no contradistinction in his mind between the Gentile church and the Kingdom of God.

Ac. 28:23, "He (Paul) witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus."

2 Thes. 1:5, "All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering."

2 Tim. 4:1, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word..."

- 2.3. Much (or in some versions of hyper-dispensationalism all) of the book of Acts has no bearing on the church today.

Refutation:

This is a logical conclusion based on faulty premises.

- 2.4. Only the revelations given to Paul pertaining to the "mystery" Gentile church are relevant for the church today.

Refutation:

Eph. 3:4-5, "In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets."

Note the plurals in the above verse. The "mystery" gospel which Paul preached had been revealed to him as well as to all the other apostles!

- 2.5. Paul's gospel was different from that of the other apostles. His was a gospel of grace, theirs (and Jesus') a "kingdom gospel" of "faith plus works"

The Jewish church was still under the law. Paul, however, did not believe that the teachings of Jesus or those of the apostles were binding on the churches he founded.

Refutation:

Paul's gospel was no different from that of the apostles (see point 4). The gospel of all the apostles consisted of the message of God's grace, mercy and offer of salvation through the blood of Christ.

1 Pet. 1:3-5, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time"

Sounds very Pauline, doesn't it? In fact, as early as Acts 2 Peter was preaching the gospel of God's grace in Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and Lordship which could be had through repentance and being baptised in Jesus' name. See Acts 2:23-38.

Paul also declared that anyone who preached a different gospel be cursed! (Gal. 1:8). If Peter were preaching a different gospel he would have been cursed by Paul!

Acts 15 states clearly that all the apostles agreed on the nature of the gospel.

Ac. 15:7-12, "After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them."

Paul affirms this.

1 Cor. 15:3-11, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am

APPENDIX 2: FOUR FRAMEWORKS OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.”

Eph. 2:19-20, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”

1 Tim. 6:3-5, “If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.”

Just like Jesus and the apostles, Paul preached a gospel of grace which leads to forgiveness of sin and to the recognition of the Lordship of Christ. Henceforth he must be obeyed!

Paul opens his letter to the Romans by describing his gospel as “*the obedience that comes from faith*” (Rom. 1:5). Virtually all his letters are divided into teaching and life application sections.

2.6. Most other epistles of the New Testament are addressed to the Hebrew Church, not to the gentile church.

Thus the books of Peter, James, Jude, Hebrews, and the epistles of John are of no direct relevance to the gentile church.

Refutation:

This is a logical step based on faulty premises outlined above.

2.7. Only Paul’s prison letters are of immediate relevance, as only these are held to have been addressed to a genuine Gentile “mystery” church.

In other words, the books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon contain the heart of the message for the Gentile church. Not even Revelation addresses the church, as the letters to the seven churches are written to the “Jewish church” of the tribulation.

Refutation:

Paul made no distinction between Jew and Gentile with respect to the content of his gospel message:

Ac. 20:20-21, "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

Ac. 26:20, "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds."

2.8. Water baptism and the Lord's Supper is rejected by many hyper-dispensationalists.

These were instituted in the gospels and Paul's letter to the Corinthians, which were addressed to a "Hebrew church".

Refutation:

This is a logical step based on the previously discussed erroneous premises. Paul's letter to the Corinthians was not addressed to a "Hebrew church" but to a mixed community of believers.

1 Cor. 1:22-24, "For Jews ask for signs, Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God."

2.9. Just as OT saints were saved through "faith and works" so people during the post-rapture tribulation period will be saved through "faith and works"

Refutation:

The Old Testament saints were also saved through saving faith, the reality of which expresses itself in good works/the obedience to the law

Rom. 4:1-9, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will

never count against them." Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness."

2.10. Many hyper-dispensationalists dismiss the importance of the Great Commission.

Since Jesus' teachings are not binding on the church his instructions that we "obey all that I command you to do" (Mat. 28:20) is both anachronistic and legalistic. The phrase "and I am with you to the end of the age" is interpreted as meaning that Christ promised to be with them to the end of that dispensation.

Refutation:

This is a logical conclusion based on the faulty premises discussed above.

Conclusion

Hyperdispensationalism is a dangerous aberration.

3. Covenant Theology

Covenant Theology is another framework for interpreting the Bible. Instead of dividing the Bible into dispensations, it traces the development and expectations of the covenants God made with mankind in the course of time.

Covenant Theology traces three basic theological covenants in Scripture: the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. It holds that all the various other covenants described in Scripture (e.g., the covenants made with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the New Covenant) are the outworking of either the Covenant of Works or the Covenant of Grace.

3.1. The Covenant of Redemption (or The Eternal Covenant)

The Covenant of Redemption is a covenant made among the three Persons of the Trinity to elect, atone, and save a group of individuals to salvation and eternal life. In other words, the nature of the plan of salvation is eternal, in which each person of the Godhead "covenanted" a specific role (Eph. 1:3-14; 3:11; 2 Thes, 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; James 2:5; 1 Peter 1:2).

Heb. 13:20, "Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep."

3.2. The Covenant of Works

The Covenant of Works was introduced in the Garden of Eden. In it God promised mankind life for obedience and judgment for disobedience.

When God created man, He gave him one simple command: *“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die”* (Gen. 2:16-17).

God promised eternal life and blessing to mankind (represented by Adam as the head of the human race) in return for man’s obedience to the stipulations of the covenant (i.e., don’t eat from the tree).

The Covenant of Works was re-introduced at Sinai, where God promised Israel long life and blessing in the land of promise on the condition of their obedience to the Mosaic covenant, but expulsion and judgment in the event of their disobedience.

3.3. The Covenant of Grace

When Adam failed to keep the Covenant of Works, God instituted the third covenant, the Covenant of Grace. In it God freely offers sinners (i.e., those who fail to live up to the Covenant of Works) eternal life and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We see the initial provision for the Covenant of Grace right after the fall when God prophesied that the “seed of the woman” would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

The Covenant of Grace is God’s unconditional promise to man to redeem and save a great number of people. While the Covenant of Works is conditional and promises blessing for obedience, and cursing for disobedience, the Covenant of Grace is unconditional and is given freely on the basis of God’s grace.

With the exception of God’s conditional covenant with Israel at Sinai, all the other biblical covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, and the New Covenant) are extensions of the Covenant of Grace which God made as He progressively worked out His plan of redemption in human history.

As already pointed out, the Mosaic Covenant is a re-application of the Covenant of Works. In it God promised blessing or judgment on Israel for obedience or disobedience. Because of the underlying Covenant of Grace God made with Abraham, however, God deals patiently with his covenant people Israel. We see this in the repeated phrase *“God remembered the covenant he made with Abraham”* (2 Kin. 13:23; Psa. 105; Isa. 29:22; 41:8).

Covenant theology sees three aspects to the conditional Mosaic Law: civil, ceremonial and moral. The civil aspect consisted of those laws which governed the nation of Israel while they lived in the Promised Land. The ceremonial aspect governed the worship of God, and the moral aspect governed the behaviour of God's people.

The moral aspect of the law is seen as the essence of the Covenant of Works, and as such it transcends its Mosaic setting, for God has always required holiness from humanity. The Covenant of Works was not negated due to the fall, even though it was fulfilled in Christ. The moral aspect of the Law still stands as the standard of morality for mankind because it is reflective of God's unchanging character. Thus Covenant Theology still sees the moral components of the Mosaic Law (especially the Ten Commandments) as prescriptive for the church, even though its ceremonial and civil aspects have been rendered obsolete.

With the coming of Jesus Christ many aspects of the Mosaic Law became obsolete because Jesus fulfilled its types and figures (Heb. 8-10, Col. 2:17; Mat. 5:17; 2 Cor. 1:20). He is the reality behind the shadows of the Old Testament sacrificial system and fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the law.

However, this does not abrogate those aspects of the Covenant of Works which codified the moral aspects of the law. God demanded holiness from his people in the OT (Lev. 11:44) and continues to demand holiness from his people in the NT (1 Pet. 1:16). So, according to Covenant Theology, we are still obligated to fulfil the moral injunctions of the Covenant of Works.

3.4. Covenant Theology and Israel

Unlike Dispensationalism, Covenant Theology does not see a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church. Israel constituted the covenant people of God in the OT, and the Church (which is made up of Jews and Gentiles) constitutes the covenant people of God in the NT. Both constitute one people of God (Eph. 2:11-20). The church does not replace Israel; the church is Israel and Israel is the Church (Gal. 6:16). All people who exercise the same faith as Abraham are part of the covenant people of God (Gal. 3:25-29).

4. **New Covenant Theology**

New Covenant Theology shares a lot in common with Covenant Theology, particularly with respect to the continuity between the church and Israel as being one people of God.

It differs from covenant theology in that it does not view the scriptures as the unfolding of redemption in a covenant of works/covenant of grace framework. It sees the Biblical narrative as a story of promise and fulfilment, in which all of God's OT promises, covenants and commands were fulfilled in Christ.

The biggest difference between New Covenant Theology and Covenant Theology is how they view the Mosaic Law. New Covenant theology sees the law as one cohesive whole. It holds that with respect to the Mosaic law, the Jews did not delineate between the civil, ceremonial and moral; these are just terms used to help identify the three areas of Israelite life that the Mosaic Law governed. It sees the Mosaic Law as a whole, and as entirely fulfilled in Christ.

Because New Covenant Theology sees the Mosaic Law as a whole, it also sees the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law as fulfilled in Christ, and no longer applying to Christians. Instead of being under the moral constraints of the Mosaic Law as summarized in the Ten Commandments, Christians are under the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21).

The law of Christ would be those prescriptions that Christ specifically stated in the Gospels (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount). In other words, the entire Mosaic system of laws has been set aside in new Covenant Theology (Heb. 8:13); it no longer applies in any way to Christians.

So, while Covenant Theology sees a continuity between the Old and New Testaments in regards to God's people and the way of salvation, New Covenant Theology draws a distinction between the Old and New Testaments when it comes to the old Mosaic Covenant's moral demands and the new covenant mediated by Christ.

Summary: According to New Covenant Theology the old covenant is obsolete in its entirety (including the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law) and replaced by the new covenant in which the law of Christ now governs its morality. That is why, for instance, Christians celebrate Sunday as the day of worship and not Saturday, even though the Ten Commandments stipulate Saturday (the Sabbath).

Appendix 3

What is *Missio Dei*?



Missio Dei, which is Latin for “the mission of God”, is one of the most popular theologies of mission at this time. The concept has led two lives. It was first embraced by mainline churches. When it had virtually run its course there some theologically conservative missiologists who embraced the basic idea, re-conceptualized aspects of it, and saw it become the most popular theological basis for missions. So what is *Missio Dei*?

1. Missio Dei in a nutshell⁶⁹

1.1. Christian mission is the all-encompassing work of the Triune God

Missio Dei's fundamental idea is that Christian mission is rooted in the all-encompassing, sending work of the triune God. God sent the Son, the Son is sent, and the Father and the Son send the Spirit. The Son also sends the church which the Spirit brought into being. The church, in turn, is charged with sending its members to join the triune God in every work of grace he is seeking to accomplish.

1.2. God's mission flows from his loving and compassionate nature

God's love is perceived as his defining characteristic.

God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is mission because God loves people (Bosch 1991:402, also 1980:240).

Love is the foundation of God's existence (Costas 1989:74);

God's compassion and love for his creation is his paramount, even overwhelming, attribute (Guder 1998:32; Kirk 1999:27).

1.3. The goal of God's mission is the holistic restoration of all creation

The goal toward which God's all-embracing love drives him is “to make all things right”. As creator of the world, God's purposes are not limited to the salvation of souls but extends to the re-establishment of a new “shalom”.

⁶⁹ This much-to-brief brief synopsis is drawn from my book *The Essence and Implications of Missio Dei*, which offers the historical background, and much more extensive explanations of this particular theology of mission.

This restoration is perceived as taking place – at least in large part – in the current historical reality. Mission thus seeks to utilize historic processes as it seeks to transform the world into the kingdom of God.

Christopher Wright, the best-known proponent of *Missio Dei* within the evangelical world, maintains that:

the fact is that sin and evil constitute bad news in every area of life on this planet. The redemptive work of God through the cross of Christ is good news for every area of life on earth that has been touched by sin. Bluntly, we need a holistic gospel because the world is in a holistic mess (Wright 2006:315).

He goes on to say that we are to “work with God to liberate men and women from the destructive delusions they foster” (Wright 2006:165).

These destructive delusions include all the idols, evils, false hopes and enticements of Western culture, ranging from material prosperity to “New-age-ism, narcissism and hedonism” (2006:166).

Basically, the concept of sin is defined as brokenness, or as a type of exile, or as enslavement to something which controls us and from which we need to be liberated.

1.4. The church is invited to be a participant with God in his mission

The triune God’s invites the church to participate in his mission of global restoration/transformation, his project of establishing “shalom” in the here and now.

Wright maintains that “fundamentally, our mission... means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation” (Wright 2006:23).

In short, the church’s job is to participate in what God is already doing globally.

1.5. Christ is to be the model of how missions should be done

The evangelical version of *Missio Dei* places great emphasis on Christ’s incarnation.

Protagonists of this model read much into John 20:21, where Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, so send I you”. And what did Christ do? He healed the sick, give sight to the blind, loved and cared for the poor. So go and do likewise!

1.6. The biblical basis for missions must be the whole Bible, not just some NT Great Commission commands

The whole Bible must be interpreted in the light of mission. Particular emphasis is placed on man's creation in the image of God, the Exodus as an act of liberation from slavery, and the year of jubilee as a model of social and financial liberation.

How can one disapprove of a holistic theology of missions which has its roots in the love of the triune God, who invites his people to join him in the restoration of all things? Yet it is precisely this model of mission which is corroding the enterprise today.

2. Problems with *Missio Dei*

They are numerous. The following is a sampling.

2.1. *Missio Dei* mutes the idea that sinful man in his natural state is an object of God's wrath

Missio Dei cannot integrate the Bible's view of the natural man as an object of God's wrath (see, for instance, Mark 7:21-22; Luke 13:1-5; John 8:24; Rom. 1:18-2:5; 5:12-19; Eph. 2:13). It does not fit with the idea of fountain-like love welling up from the heart of God.

Thus the idea of sin as personal, individual, and pertaining primarily to man's culpability before God – and not just separation from Him – is either de-emphasized or disregarded altogether.

Sin is not defined in terms of how it affects man's relationship with God, but in the way it affects people. It is defined by what we are saved from, not by whom we have offended.

2.2. *Missio Dei's* presentation of God's love as his attribute *par excellence* is a half-truth

There is hardly a verse in the NT which speaks of God's love that does not also speak of the cross (see, for example, John 3:16, Gal. 2:20; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:10). The all-embracing fountain of God's love which proponents of *Missio Dei* so celebrate is, in fact, mediated through the risen Christ, and thus only available to those who are in Christ, to those whose sins have been atoned for on the cross.

The problem here is that *missio Dei* eliminates the difference between God's salvific and common grace, as a result of which God's love is seen as operating outside the cross as well as through it. This is quite possible if one glosses over man's legal culpability before a holy God.

Although God's common grace makes this world liveable for most of us, ultimately things only work out for good for those who meet the criteria of having been called by God and are living according to his purposes (Rom. 8:28).

The gospel is not simply declaring that the kingdom of God has come, but declaring that one must enter it through repentance of sin, faith in Christ's substitutionary atonement and resurrection from the dead, and the gift of the "new birth".

2.3. Missio Dei downplays divine judgement and hell as motives for mission

Almost all books on *Missio Dei* ignore the subject of eternal judgment and hell, or maintain, like Sunquist of Fuller Theological Seminary, that "We cannot know the fate of those who came before the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, nor can we be sure of the fate of those who have never heard of Jesus Christ" (Sunquist 2013:335).

This is a remarkable affirmation of ignorance for someone in the business of training evangelical missionaries—after all, substantial biblically-based answers on the subject can be found in virtually any evangelical, conservative systematic theology. By ignoring this subject you are cutting the nerve of Christian missions.

2.4. Missio Dei distorts Christ's mission

Missio Dei reads much into John 20:21, where Jesus said, "*As the Father has sent me, so send I you*". Just as Christ healed and fed, so are we to do the same.

But did Christ really come to live a life in the service of the needs of mankind? Is John 20:21 even a model for missions?

It is misleading to suggest that Jesus' ministry focused on serving; there are no examples of Jesus going into a town with the stated purpose of healing the sick or casting out demons.

Jesus did not pursue political or social transformation in the current historical reality—to the great disappointment of the crowds. Nor did the apostles, as they preached the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Then why should we?

This doesn't mean that Jesus didn't care for the outcasts, the sick and the poor. Of course he did! But "the mission of Jesus is... the *proclamation* of the gospel through teaching, the *corroboration* of the gospel through signs and wonders, and the *accomplishment* of the gospel in death and resurrection" (italics in original, DeYoung & Gilbert 2011:57).

The purpose statements in the gospels make this clear: Jesus came to preach, to call sinners, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Jn. 1:28; Mk. 1:38, 2:17; 10:45).

2.5. *Missio Dei* distorts the role of the church in missions

Fusing God's mission and the church's mission into one and by having the church shoulder the task of world transformation, *Missio Dei* opened the way to one of the current phenomena of evangelical Christian mission: missionaries involved in various "churchless missionary activities".

D. A. Carson is scathing on the matter:

I know numerous groups that claim to be engaging in 'holistic' ministry because they are helping the poor in Chicago or because they are digging wells in the Sahel, even though few, if any, of the workers have taken time to explain to anyone who Jesus is and what he has done to reconcile us to God. Their ministry isn't holistic; it's halfistic or quarteristic (Carson 2011).

Within the realm of common grace God's transformational activities may well include developing better medical services, teaching in national schools, digging wells, militating for ecologically responsible legislation, promoting better agricultural methods, sponsoring projects for orphans, and involvement in dozens of other such worthwhile projects which have little or no church connection. However, when these activities are perceived as a fundamental part of Christian missions, gospel proclamation becomes something tagged on to various types of "transformational activities" (if it happens at all), particularly when the church engages in these activities with people, governments and NGOs which do not share its basic worldview.

Should the church really be working with non-Christian agencies when carrying out its "transformative" activities.

Furthermore, when the church comes to be regarded in terms of her service to the world, its function becomes more important than its nature as a worshiping, counter-cultural community whose citizenship is in heaven.

The church's primary missionary task is not serving the world, good and praiseworthy as that is. In terms of its responsibility to the world it is to be a witness to God's grace in Christ, proclaiming the good news of his atoning death and victorious resurrection, the results of which are available to all through repentance and faith (Ac. 1:8; 5:42; 6:4,7; 22:15; 1 Cor. 9:16-23; Col. 1:28-29; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; 1 Pet. 5:1) and the gathering of these "born again" ones into churches (Ac. 14:21-23; 18:1-11).

What good is a “holistic ministry” if it doesn’t, in the first place, focus on seeing people become “whole” again in Christ? Yet even otherwise strongly evangelical proponents of *Missio Dei* are critical of the idea of placing a higher priority on evangelism than on social transformation:

The language of ‘priority’ implies that all else is ‘secondary’ at best... In other words, the language of priority and primacy quickly tends to imply singularity and exclusion... We are back to so exalting the New Testament evangelistic mandate that we think it absolves us from all other dimensions of God’s mission that the rest of the Bible requires of God’s people... The word *priority* suggests something that has to be your starting point... (Wright 2006:317, italics in original).

If evangelism is merely one of many aspects of mission, all of which are of equal importance, then the heart of missions has changed fundamentally. Indeed, if every good and positive thing falls under the rubric of *Missio Dei* then the concept of mission itself is emptied of specific meaning and, as a result, can be marshalled to support anything and everything.

2.6. *Missio Dei*’s goal of social transformation is flawed

There are several problems with *Missio Dei*’s approach to social transformation.

a. The biblical concept of justice is not necessarily that which we believe to be the right thing

The minute you begin to define social justice, you run into difficulties. It becomes most often a term meaning ‘we need a law against that’.

This kind of “mission” easily degenerates into political lobbying for our favorite causes. There is nothing wrong with individual Christians lobbying for particular causes they feel strongly about, but nowhere does the NT tie that to the church’s mission.

b. Social transformation presents a false hope as the end-goal of the missionary enterprise

Many church leaders do their people a disservice by leading them to hope too much for the betterment of society ‘in this present evil age’, which still languishes in bondage and futility. Mission statements like “Transform the City and the World” and “Change the City, Change the World” go far beyond what the Bible tells us we can expect to see in the world before Jesus returns.

Major aspects of *Missio Dei*—everything to do with social transformation—simply don't work in the increasingly large sections of the world where Christians are persecuted, where hope for a better life is firmly wedded to Christ's second coming, and where Christians recognize that things will probably go from bad to worse for them.

In *Missio Dei* the 'eschatological realism' of the Bible is being overlooked, i.e. the prophecies about concrete events expected to happen at the end of times: the maturation of evil, the empire of the Antichrist, the end of this world and the Last Judgment.

Also, the socio-political agendas of the Christian Right, the Christian Left, and the neo-Anabaptists are very different (almost polar opposites) from each other. Which one is right? Typically, *Missio Dei* proponents tend to support issues which have a distinctly "progressive/Christian left" flavor. Somehow their exegesis and holistic views lead to politically correct positions (from a western, progressive point of view) on the issues of the day.

Furthermore, history has shown time and again how rapidly formerly "holistic" Christian missionary enterprises such as medical, educational and developmental institutions drift from the Christian fold⁷⁰.

If you are looking for a picture of the early church giving itself to creation care, plans for societal renewal, and strategies to serve the community in Jesus' name, you won't find them in Acts. But if you are looking for preaching, teaching and the centrality of the Word, this is your book (DeYoung & Gilbert 2011:49).

They also appointed deacons so that the apostles could devote themselves to the word of God and prayer and, later, elders to "direct the affairs of the church well" (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 5:17).

2.7. *Missio Dei's doctrinal imprecision leads to a host of problems*

We have already seen how doctrines such as hell tend to be glossed over. Other classic doctrines are also given short shrift.

a. The teaching of divine election unto salvation does not easily fit the model

⁷⁰ For an extensive history of this fact with respect to the Middle East, see my book *Protestant Missionaries to the Middle East: Ambassadors of Christ or Culture?* ALEV Books, 2008.

It is impossible to integrate either the Calvinist teaching that Christ died “for a particular people” or the classic Arminian position that God’s prevenient grace precedes regeneration with *Missio Dei*’s ideas about the huge, fountain-like love of God which embraces all people equally and seeks everyone’s wellbeing without differentiation.

If the acceptance or rejection of God’s indiscriminate love-overtures lies with mankind then the only theological underpinning which fits the model is semi-pelagianism.

- b. The very idea that the church is invited to participate with what God is doing undermines God’s authority

God doesn’t invite his people, he commands them.

The Great Commission statements are the church’s marching orders: “Go! Make disciples!” Much as major proponents of *Missio Dei* play down those “military style commands”, commands they are, given by the One who establishes the parameters and stipulations within which his people are to live and serve, and then sovereignly gives them the necessary grace to carry out his commands.

- c. Missio Dei is all about what God is doing without asking questions about what Satan might be doing

The reality of two kingdoms, a kingdom of light and a kingdom of darkness, which are at war until Christ’s second coming, is much more reflective of New Testament teaching. Yes, God is the ruler of history, but his kingdom pertains to the spiritual realities which flow from Christ’s redemptive work: the realignment of the wills of those who are regenerated by God’s spirit and their formation into strongly counter-cultural communities, local churches whose values should be at odds with those of the world at large.

- d. Missio Dei does not allow for the possibility that God may choose to use evil both to discipline the body of believers and as an instrument leading to the eternal salvation of some

Habakkuk’s and Asaph’s questions (Psalm 73) about the purposes of evil and why the wicked are allowed to prosper while the righteous suffer are almost impossible to answer in a theology of all-encompassing divine love.



Doctrinal imprecision allows for both wider ecumenical and inter-cultural engagement and cooperation, something which many of the model’s protagonists celebrate (see for instance Sunquist 2013:165).

The problem here is the failure to recognize that Christian unity and ministry must be based on Christian love *and* truth. Sacrificing fundamental New Testament teachings is sacrificing one of the church's main missionary obligations: proclamation.

2.8. *Missio Dei* uses questionable exegesis to build a hermeneutic to undergird its vision of mission

The problem with basing a Christian theology largely on OT paradigms is that it leads to distortions because it does not do justice to the fact that the Bible is a progressive revelation leading inexorably to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the New Covenant which that ushered into being.

Missio Dei engages in mere proof-texting by presenting certain OT events as paradigmatic while other teachings and events (like Noah's Flood, the extermination of the Canaanites, etc.) are pointedly ignored or reinterpreted in ways that the New Testament writers could not have imagined.

Conclusion:

Why has *Missio Dei* become so popular today? Several factors combined to create great receptivity for it: strong social and environmental concerns; theological fuzziness; a suspicion of "one narrative explains all" mindsets; the virtue of tolerance with its implicit theological pluralism, and the fact that relationships matter more than propositional truths.

However, *Missio Dei's* doctrinal imprecision, its desire to re-engage ecumenically with non-evangelicals, the fact that it has little use for the notion of hell, the idea that God's mission is not necessarily mediated through the church but that, at the same time, "the church must... take the world's agenda seriously", and a hyper-emphasis of the love of God divorced from the cross, means it has no firm anchor. Little wonder the missionary enterprise is corroding from within. It runs the risk of become nothing more than the old social gospel of the liberal churches.

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