

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

*~ A Pentecostal Perspective ~*

Edited By  
Stanley M. Horton

*Stanley M. Horton*  
*Romans 15:13*

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# Preface

During the early centuries of the history of the Church, many stated their faith in letters, creeds, and confessions. These theological affirmations were used in the worship and in the defense of the faith. So it is to this day: The Church continues to affirm its faith in the revelation of God in Christ through the ongoing work of theological writing and dialogue.

This present volume comes from the Pentecostal community of faith and is the work of teachers of Bible and theology in the seminary and colleges of the Assemblies of God. It is a statement that the work of theology is valued and approached seriously and earnestly in the Pentecostal branch of the Church.

The **first** intended audience for this book is the students at the institutions represented by the authors. They deserve to read theology from the perspectives of teachers within the educational community in which they are studying. The clergy of the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal fellowships, too, should have the privilege of a theological presentation that is in keeping with the faith they have received and are passing on to the congregations they serve. Local church members will also profit from reading this biblical affirmation of faith. Other churches and denominations can receive benefit as well, for most of the truths defended in this work are also held by all Bible believers.

I wish to thank Dr. G. Raymond **Carlson**, general superintendent of the Assemblies of God (1985–93); the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary; Central Bible College; Berean College; the Postsecondary Education Department of the Assemblies of God; the Division of Foreign Missions of the As-

semblies of God; and others who have made this project possible. Special thanks are due to Dr. Edgar Lee, Dr. Elmer Kirsch, Dr. Zenas Bicket, and Rev. David Bundrick, who have read the manuscripts and made many helpful suggestions. Special thanks also are due to Glen Ellard and his editorial staff for their expert help.

In line with the usage of both the KJV and the NIV, LORD is used in capitals and small capitals where the Hebrew of the Old Testament has the personal, divine name of God, Yahweh (which was probably pronounced *ya-wā*).<sup>1</sup>

In quoted Scripture, words the authors wish to emphasize are in italics.

For easier reading, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words are all transliterated with English letters.

These abbreviations have been used:

AV: Authorized Version

BDB: New *Brown-Driver-Briggs Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*

DPCM: *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*

Ger.: German

Gk.: Greek

Heb.: Hebrew

KJV: King James Version

Lat.: Latin

NASB: New *American Standard Bible*

NCV: New Century Version

NEB: *The New English Bible*

NIV: New International Version

NKJV: New King James Version

NRS: New Revised Standard Version

RSV: Revised Standard Version

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<sup>1</sup>The Hebrew wrote only the consonants YHWH. Later traditions followed the New Latin JINH and added vowels from the Hebrew for "Lord" to remind them to read *Lord* instead of the divine name But this was never intended to be read 'Jehovah.'

## CHAPTER ONE

# Historical Background

Gary B. McGee

Someone once remarked that Pentecostalism is an experience looking for a theology, as if the movement lacked roots in biblical interpretation and Christian doctrine. Research on the historical and theological development of Pentecostal beliefs, however, has revealed a complex theological tradition. It bears strong commonalities with evangelical doctrines while testifying to long-neglected truths about the work of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the Church.

Beginning with the theological background of Pentecostalism, this chapter then focuses on the growth of Assemblies of God theology since the organization's founding in 1914. Factors considered include paramount concerns, influential personalities, significant literature, and various means employed to preserve doctrine.

### THE CONTINUANCE OF THE CHARISMATA

Throughout the history of Christianity, there have always been individuals seeking for "something more" in their spiritual pilgrimage, occasionally prompting them to explore the meaning of Spirit baptism and spiritual gifts. Recent scholarship has shed new light on the history of charismatic movements, demonstrating that such interest in the work of the Holy Spirit has remained throughout the history of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>According to Killian McDonnell and George I. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), baptism in the Holy Spirit was an integral (normative) part of Christian initiation during the first eight centuries of the Church. For a related study on the second- and third-century North African church see Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *Prophecy in Carthage: Perpetua, Tertullian, and*

At least two revivals in the nineteenth century could be considered forerunners of modern Pentecostalism. The first occurred in England (beginning in 1830) during the ministry of Edward Irving and the second in the southern tip of India (beginning around 1860) through the influence of Plymouth Brethren theology and the leadership of the Indian churchman J. C. Aroolappen. Contemporaneous reports on both included references to speaking in tongues and prophecy.<sup>1</sup>

In part, the conclusions of this research correct the belief in some quarters that the *charismata* necessarily ceased with the Apostolic Era, a view most forcefully proposed by Benjamin B. Warfield in his *Counterfeit Miracles* (1918). Warfield contended that the objective, written authority of Scripture as inspired by the Holy Spirit would inevitably be undermined by those who taught a subjective concept of the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, this perspective has steadily lost ground in evangelical circles.<sup>3</sup>

*Cyprian* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1993). A survey of occurrences of charismatic gifts to the end of the third century is provided by Ronald A. N. Kydd in *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984). Stanley M. Burgess furnishes a broader study of Latin, Greek, and Syrian spiritual writers to the end of the medieval period in *The Spirit and the Church: Antiquity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984) and *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989).

<sup>1</sup>For a helpful bibliography see David D. Bundy, "Irving, Edward," in *The Dictionary of Pentecost and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess, Gary B. McGee, and Patrick Alexander (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 470–71; hereinafter *DPCM*. For the thesis that Irving's doctrine of speaking in tongues served as the "standing sign" of Spirit baptism and parallels the later view of tongues as "initial evidence," see David W. Dorries, "Edward Irving and the 'Standing Sign' of Spirit Baptism," in *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism*, ed. Gary B. McGee (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 41–56. For the revival in south India, see G. I. Lang, *The History and Diaries of an Indian Christian* (London: Thynne and Co., 1939); *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves*, 3d ed. (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1869), 571–640.

<sup>2</sup>Warfield and other theologians of the "Old Princeton" school of theology represented antirevivalist sentiments in American Presbyterianism. See Mark A. Noll, ed. and comp., *The Princeton Theology: 1812–1921* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983); Jon Ruthven, "On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic of Benjamin B. Warfield," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 12 (Spring 1990): 14–31.

<sup>3</sup>This is evident in Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 880–82.

With the coming of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century revivalism in Europe and North America, Calvinist, Lutheran, and evangelical Arminian preachers emphasized repentance and piety in the Christian life.<sup>4</sup> Any study of Pentecostalism must pay close attention to the happenings of this period and particularly to the doctrine of Christian perfection taught by John Wesley, the father of Methodism, and his associate John Fletcher. Wesley's publication of *A Short Account of Christian Perfection* (1760) urged his followers to seek a new spiritual dimension in their lives. This second work of grace, distinct from conversion, would deliver one from the defect in one's moral nature that prompts sinful behavior.

This teaching spread to America and inspired the growth of the Holiness movement.<sup>5</sup> With the focus on the sanctified life but without the mention of speaking in tongues, Pentecostal imagery from Scripture (e.g., "outpouring of the Spirit," "baptism in the Holy Spirit," "the tongue of fire") eventually became a hallmark of Holiness literature and hymnody. One of the foremost leaders in the Wesleyan wing of the movement, Phoebe Palmer, a Methodist, edited the *Guide to Holiness* and wrote, among other books, *The Promise of the Father* (1859). Another popular writer, William Arthur, authored the best-seller *Tongue of Fire* (1856).

Those who sought to receive the "second blessing" were taught that each Christian needed to "tarry" (Luke 24:49, KJV) for the promised baptism in the Holy Spirit; this would break the power of inbred sin and usher the believer into the Spirit-filled life. Furthermore, Joel had prophesied that as a result

<sup>4</sup>See F. E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), and *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973); on the popular level see Dale W. Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978). For the Great Awakening in Britain and North America, see Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *John Wesley: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978); Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (1746); Darrett B. Rutman, ed., *The Great Awakening* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1970).

<sup>5</sup>See Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1987); and Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980). See also the "Higher Christian Life" series, a collection of Holiness and Pentecostal reprints issued by Garland Publishing, Inc.

## CHAPTER

## 1

Historical  
Background

of the outpouring of God's Spirit "your sons *and daughters* will prophesy" in the last days (Joel 2:28).<sup>7</sup>

Belief in a second work of grace was not confined to the Methodist circuit. For example, Charles G. Finney believed that Spirit baptism provided divine empowerment to achieve Christian perfection<sup>8</sup> at the same time that his theology refused to fit comfortably in either Wesleyan or Reformed categories. Although historic Reformed theology has identified Spirit baptism with conversion, some revivalists within that tradition entertained the notion of a second work for empowering believers, among them Dwight L. Moody and R. A. Torrey. Even with this endowment of power, however, sanctification retained its progressive nature.<sup>9</sup> Another pivotal figure and former Presbyterian, A. B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, strongly emphasized Spirit baptism and had a major impact on the formation of Assemblies of God doctrine.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, the Keswick conferences in Great Britain (begun in 1875) also influenced American Holiness thinking. Keswick's teachers believed that baptism in the Holy Spirit brought an ongoing victorious life (the "higher," or "deeper," life), characterized by the "fullness of the Spirit." This became the interpretation they preferred rather than the Wesleyan concept, which maintained that Spirit baptism brought "sinless" perfection.<sup>11</sup>

In the nineteenth century, medical science advanced slowly, offering little help to the seriously ill. Belief in the miraculous power of God for physical healing found a reception in a few circles. In nineteenth-century Germany, ministries that highlighted prayer for the sick (especially those of Dorothea Trudel, Johann Christoph Blumhardt, and Otto Stockmayer)

<sup>7</sup>Appeal to this promise effectively laid the foundation for women to preach, and serve in other ministries. For rationales for this interpretation see Donald W. Dayton, ed., *Holiness Tracts Defending the Ministry of Women* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985); Joseph R. Flower, "Does God Deny Spiritual Manifestations and Ministry Gifts to Women?" 7 November 1979 (typewritten).

<sup>8</sup>John L. Gresham, Jr., *Charles G. Finney's Doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987).

<sup>9</sup>Edith L. Waldvogel (Blumhofer), "The 'Overcoming Life': A Study in the Reformed Evangelical Origins of Pentecostalism" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1977).

<sup>10</sup>Charles W. Nienkirchen, A. B. Simpson and the Pentecostal Movement (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992).

<sup>11</sup>Dayton, *Theological Roots*, 104–6.

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## 1

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gained attention in America. Holiness theology, with its belief in instantaneous purification from sin or spiritual empowerment, provided a warm environment for the teaching of immediate healing by faith.<sup>12</sup>

For many believers, Spirit baptism fully restored the spiritual relationship that Adam and Eve had with God in the Garden of Eden. Significantly, the higher life in Christ could also reverse the physical effects of the Fall, enabling believers to take authority over sickness. Healing advocates such as Charles C. Cullis, A. B. Simpson, A. J. Gordon, Carrie Judd Montgomery, Maria B. Woodworth-Etter, and John Alexander Dowie based much of their belief on Isaiah 53:4–5, as well as New Testament promises of healing. Since Christ was not only the "sin-bearer," but also the "sickness-bearer," those who lived by faith in God's promise (Exod. 15:26) no longer required medical assistance, clearly betraying a lack of faith if they did.

The increasingly "Pentecostal" complexion of the Holiness movement disposed adherents to a consideration of the gifts of the Spirit in the life of the Church. While most assumed that speaking in tongues had ended with the Early Church, the other gifts, including healing, were available to Christians.<sup>13</sup> Nothing but unbelief now could prevent the New Testament Church from being reestablished in holiness and power.

But when the radical Wesleyan Holiness preacher Benjamin Hardin Irwin began teaching three works of grace in 1895, trouble lay ahead. For Irwin, the second blessing initiated sanctification, but the third brought the "baptism of burning love" (i.e., baptism in the Holy Spirit). The mainstream of the Holiness movement condemned this "third blessing heresy" (which, among other things, created the problem of distinguishing evidence for the third from that of the second). Even so, Irwin's notion of a third work of grace for power in Chris-

<sup>12</sup>Paul G. Chappell, "The Divine Healing Movement in America" (Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1983); for an abridged edition, see Paul G. Chappell, "Healing Movements," in *DPCM*, 353–74.

<sup>13</sup>W. B. Godbey, *Spiritual Gifts and Graces* (Cincinnati: God's Revivalist Office, 1895; reprinted in *Six Tracts by W. B. Godbey*, ed. D. William Faupel [New York: Garland Publishing, 1985]); S. A. Keen, *Pentecostal Papers; or, the Gift of the Holy Ghost* (Cincinnati: By the author, 1895), 151–90.

tian service laid an important foundation for the Pentecostal movement.<sup>14</sup>

#### PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY AND MISSIONS

Although nineteenth-century evangelicals generally adopted amillennial or postmillennial views, it was the latter that caught the spirit of the age. Writers of all kinds, from Charles Darwin to John Henry Newman to Charles Hodge, saw the positive values of progress in science, formation of doctrine, and eschatology, respectively. Others, however, concluded that the condition of humankind would get worse before the imminent return of the Lord.<sup>15</sup>

Premillennialists' gloomy assessment of the immediate future generated serious concerns among those committed to world evangelization. The larger part of the missions movement had spent considerable time and energy on civilizing the native populations in preparation for their conversion—by building schools, orphanages, and clinics. Because of the secondary emphasis on conversionary evangelism, the actual number of converts proved to be alarmingly small.<sup>16</sup> Premillennial expositions of Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation; the rise of the Zionist movement; the arms race of the 1890s; and the approaching end of a century caused many to wonder aloud how the unreached millions would hear the gospel message to save them from eternal destruction.

The blending of the themes of Christ as Savior, Baptizer (Sanctifier), Healer, and Coming King, described as the “full gospel” or the “fourfold gospel,” reflected the desire to restore New Testament Christianity in the last days. The widespread interest in the Spirit's baptism and gifts convinced some that God would bestow the gift of tongues to outfit them with identifiable human languages (*xenolalia*) to preach

<sup>14</sup>H. Vinson Synan, “Irwin, Benjamin Hardin,” in *DPCM*, 471-72; that Irwin later joined the Pentecostal movement has become evident from the research of David D. Bundy in his “Spiritual Advice to a Seeker: Letters to T. B. Barratt from Azusa Street, 1906,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 14 (Fall 1992): 167-68.

<sup>15</sup>Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism: 1875-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), and George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>16</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Missions Tomorrow* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936), 94-96; also William R. Hutchison, *Eward to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 99-100.

the gospel in other countries, thereby expediting missionary evangelism.

In one instance, revival at the Topeka, Kansas, YMCA in 1889-1890 triggered the organization of the Kansas--Sudan Mission, whose members shortly left for missionary work in West Africa. Passing through New York City, they visited A. B. Simpson's headquarters, where they heard his views on healing and became confident that the simple faith life and the power of the Spirit would prepare them for whatever lay ahead. One observer reported that “two of their main principles were Faith-healing, and Pentecostal gifts of tongues; no medicines were to be taken, no grammars or dictionaries made use of; the party was attacked by malignant fever; two died, refusing quinine.”<sup>17</sup> And though the expedition ended in tragedy, the ideal lived on.

In 1895, the widely read Holiness author and editor W. B. Godbey predicted that the “Gift of Language” was “destined to play a conspicuous part in the evangelization of the heathen world, amid the glorious prophetic fulfillment of the latter days. All missionaries in heathen lands should seek and expect this Gift to enable them to preach fluently in the vernacular tongue, at the same time not depreciating their own efforts.”<sup>18</sup> Many others shared the same hope.

Another advocate of this missionary use of tongues was Frank W. Sandford, founder of the Holy Ghost and Us Bible School at Shiloh, Maine, in 1895. Through his teaching and mission endeavors (publicized in *Tongues of Fire*) Sandford also hoped to speedily evangelize the world. Not only did he pray to receive the gift of tongues for evangelism, but others did as well.<sup>19</sup>

By the turn of the century, the Holiness movement had become preoccupied with the “Pentecostal reformation of Wesleyan doctrine” and the four themes of the full gospel. In fact, when the Pentecostal movement began a few years later, only the priority given to the gift of tongues distin-

<sup>17</sup>Robert Needham Cust, *Evangelization of the Non-Christian World* (London: Luzac and Co., 1894), 106-7. See also his *Gospel Message* (London: Luzac and Co., 1896), 146. For Simpson's perspective on the restoration of the gift of tongues, see Nienkirchen, A. B. Simpson, 74-76.

<sup>18</sup>Godbey, *Spiritual Gifts and Graces*, 43; cf., id. *Tongue Movement, Satanic* (Zarephath, NJ.: Pillar of Fire, 1918); reprinted in Faupel, *Six Tracts*, 5.

<sup>19</sup>William Charles Hiss, “Shiloh: Frank W. Sandford and the Kingdom, 1893-1948” (Ph.D. dissertation, Tufts University, 1978), 101-4; for others who sought, 163.



guished it theologically from Holiness beliefs? Daniel W. Kerr, the most influential theological voice in the early years of the Assemblies of God, remarked in 1922:

During the past few years God has enabled us to discover and recover this wonderful truth concerning the Baptism in the Spirit as it was given at the beginning. Thus we have all that the others got [i.e., Luther, Wesley, Blumhardt, **Trudel**, and A. B. Simpson], and we got this too. We see all they see, but they don't see what we see.<sup>21</sup>

With little difficulty, Pentecostals continued reading Holiness literature and singing such favorite songs as "The Cleansing Wave," "The Comforter Has Come," "Beulah Land," and "Old Time Power": New wine had been poured into old **wine-skins**.<sup>22</sup>

Also hoping that they too would receive the power of the Spirit to quickly evangelize the world were the Kansas Holiness preacher Charles Fox **Parham** and his followers. Convinced by their own study of the Book of Acts, and influenced by Irwin and Sandford, **Parham** reported a remarkable revival at the Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, in January 1901.<sup>23</sup> Most of the students and **Parham** himself rejoiced at being baptized in the Spirit and speaking in tongues (i.e., *xenolalia*). Just as God had filled the 120 with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, they too had received the promise (Acts 2:39). In fact, the "apostolic faith" of the New Testament Church had at last **been fully** restored. It followed then that Bennett Freeman Lawrence would name the first history of the Pentecostal movement *The Apostolic Faith Restored* (1916).

**Parham's** distinctive theological contribution to the movement lies in his insistence that tongues represents the vital "Bible evidence" of the third work of grace: the baptism in the Holy Spirit, clearly illustrated in the pattern of chapters 2, 10, and 19 in Acts. In his *Voice Crying in the Wilderness* (1902, 1910), **Parham** wrote that recipients were sealed as

<sup>20</sup>Dayton, *Theological Roots*, 173–79.

<sup>21</sup>D. W. Kerr, "The Basis for Our Distinctive Testimony," *Pentecostal Evangel*, 2 September 1922, 4.

<sup>22</sup>Charles Edwin Jones, "Holiness Movement," in *DPCM*, 406–9; id., *Perfectionist Persuasion* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974).

<sup>23</sup>James R. Goff, Jr., *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, Ark.: University of Arkansas Press, 1988).

the "bride of Christ" (2 Cor. 1:21–22; Kev. 7; 21). Sanctified and prepared now as an elite band of end-time missionaries, they alone would be taken by Christ at the (pre-Tribulation) rapture of the Church after they had completed their role in fulfilling the Great Commission. Other Christians would face the ordeal of survival during the seven years of tribulation to follow.<sup>24</sup> Despite the eventual relegation of this teaching to the fringes of the Pentecostal movement, it did raise an issue that still lingers: the uniqueness of the Spirit's work in those who have spoken in tongues as compared with those who have **not**.<sup>25</sup>

Topeka contributed to the later internationally significant Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, California (1906–1909). Its foremost leader was the African-American William J. **Seymour**,<sup>26</sup> and news of the "latter rain" (of Joel 2:23) quickly spread overseas through Seymour's newspaper, the *Apostolic Faith*, and the efforts of many who traveled from the Azusa Street meetings across North America and abroad.

Although other important Pentecostal revivals occurred (e.g., Zion, Ill.; Toronto; Dunn, N.C.), the complexity and meaning of the Los Angeles revival still challenges historians. Its themes of eschatological expectancy and evangelistic power (**Parham's** legacy) mapped the path taken by white Pentecostals in their aggressive efforts to preach the gospel "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, KJV).<sup>27</sup> African-American Pentecostals, on the other hand, have drawn attention to the reconciliation of the races and the outpouring of power on the downtrodden at Azusa, evidenced by the uncommon interracial makeup of the services, catalyzed by

<sup>24</sup>Charles F. Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* (Baxter Springs, Kan.: Apostolic Faith Bible College, reprint of 1910 ed.), 30–32; id., *The Everlasting Gospel* (Baxter Springs, Kan.: Apostolic Faith Bible College, reprint of 1911 ed.), 63–69; see also Goff, *Fields White*, 77–79.

<sup>25</sup>Gordon Anderson, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics," paper presented at the 22d annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Springfield, Missouri, November 1992, 12–14. See also, Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 105–19.

<sup>26</sup>Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Azusa Street Revival" in *DPCM*, 31–36; also, Frank Bartleman, *What Really Happened at "Azusa Street?"* ed. John Walker (Northridge, Calif.: Voice Christian Publications, 1962; original printing, 1925); and Douglas J. Nelson, "For Such a Time as This: The Story of Bishop William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival" (Ph.D. dissertation, Birmingham University, 1981).

<sup>27</sup>For **Parham's** legacy, see Goff, *Fields White*; also id., "Initial Tongues in the Theology of Charles Fox **Parham**," in *Initial Evidence*, 57–71.

## CHAPTER

## 1

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the fruit of the Spirit (Seymour's **legacy**).<sup>28</sup> Both are vital parts of the story. Even though the burden for evangelism inspired global outreach, Pentecostals have much to learn from the message of reconciliation that also highlighted the **revival**.<sup>29</sup>

## DIVISIONS OVER THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Theological differences did not evaporate in the excitement of announcing the coming of the latter rain. Three major controversies faced the new movement in the first sixteen years of its existence.

The first issue to divide Pentecostals arose in late **1906**. It centered on the theological value of narrative literature (Acts and the longer ending of Mark **16**) in building the case for the doctrine of tongues as the "initial evidence" of Spirit baptism. Those who followed in **Parham's** wake considered tongues evidential and the pattern in Acts authoritative, as much as any propositional passages. That is, tongues in Acts seemed to have the function of being evidence of the baptism; whereas tongues in 1 Corinthians had other functions: for the individual's prayer life (14:4,14,28) and (with interpretation) for the congregation's edification (14:5,27). But to those who scrutinized the Book of Acts from what they considered a Pauline point of view, the tongues in Acts was not **different** from the gift of tongues in Corinthians."

Those who believe in tongues as initial evidence of Spirit baptism have followed the hermeneutical pattern of other restorationists: elevating factors in the life of the Church to doctrinal standing. After all, how could one possibly deny that the theme of Acts is the Spirit's work of sending the disciples to preach the gospel to the whole world, accompanied by "signs and wonders" (Acts 4:29-30)? In this doctrine, and in some circles the doctrine of footwashing, Trinitarian Pentecostals appealed to a doctrinal pattern in narrative literature.

During the years after 1906, more and more Pentecostals

<sup>28</sup>For Seymour's legacy, see Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "William J. Seymour and 'the Bible Evidence,'" in *Initial Evidence*, 72-95; Leonard Lovett, "Black 1 Ioliness-Pentecostalism," in *DPCM*, 76-84; and Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecost Between Black and White* (Belfast: Christian Journals, 1974).

<sup>29</sup>Murray W. Dempster, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Scholars Call for End to Apartheid," *Transformation* (January/March 1992): 32-33.

<sup>30</sup>See Gary B. McGee, "Early Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Tongues as Evidence in the Book of Acts," in *Initial Evidence*, 96-118.

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recognized that in most instances of tongues, believers were actually praying in unidentifiable rather than identifiable **languages** (i.e., *glossolalia* rather than *xenolalia*). Although **Parham** retained his view of the preaching nature of tongues, more and more Pentecostals concluded that tongues **represented** prayer in the Spirit, intercession, and praise."

The second debate revolved around the second work of grace, sanctification: Was it instantaneous or progressive? Predictably, the lines were drawn between those Pentecostals with Wesleyan sympathies (three works of grace) and those with Reformed sympathies (two works). In the sermon "The Finished Work of Calvary" (preached in 1910 at the Pentecostal Convention at the Stone Church in Chicago, Illinois), Baptist-turned-Pentecostal William H. Durham declared that the problem of inbred sin had been dealt the fatal blow, having been crucified with Christ on the cross. By placing faith in the efficacy of that event, a person could continue to bear spiritual fruit from Christ's imputed **righteousness**.<sup>32</sup>

The third contention among Pentecostals resulted from the restorationist impulse and the heavy Christological emphasis of the full gospel. Questions about the nature of the Godhead manifested themselves at the international Pentecostal camp meeting at Arroyo **Seco** (near Los Angeles). During a baptismal sermon preached by R. E. **McAlister**, he observed that the apostles had baptized using the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38) instead of the Trinitarian formula (Matt. 28:19). Those who felt they had discovered more light on the restoration of the New Testament Church were rebaptized in the name of Jesus, following what they considered another pattern in the Book of Acts. Several people, including Frank J. Ewart, continued their study of water baptism and from this a new grouping of churches **developed**.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup>A. G. Garr, "Tongues, the Bible Evidence," *A Cloud of Witnesses to Pentecost in India* (September 1907): 42-44; Carrie Judd Montgomery, "The Promise of the Father," *Triumphs of Faith* (July 1908): 149. An insightful discussion on the meaning of Spirit Baptism to early Pentecostals can be found in Edith L. Blumhofer, *Pentecost in My Soul* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), 17-38.

<sup>32</sup>D. William Faupel, "William H. Durham and the Finished Work of Calvary," in *Pentecost, Mission and Ecumenism*, ed. Jan A. B. Jongeneel (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 85-95.

<sup>33</sup>Frank J. Ewart, *The Phenomenon of Pentecost* (St. Louis: Pentecostal Publishing House, 1947). For a Oneness discourse on the Trinity see David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God* (Hazelwood, Mo.: Word Aflame Press, 1983); for a Trinitarian response see Carl Brumback, *God in Three Persons* (Cleveland, Tenn.: Pathway Press, 1959); for a historical study see David A. Reed, "Origins and Development of the Theology of Oneness Pentecostalism in the United States" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1978).

These believers emphasized the “oneness,” or unity, of the Godhead in contrast to the orthodox Christian view of one God in three **Persons**.<sup>34</sup> In addition, Oneness theologians maintained that since Jesus Christ is the redemptive name of God, it is through that name that salvation and God’s blessings are bestowed. Two camps have existed within the Oneness movement from the beginning: those who believe that conversion and water baptism in the name of Jesus are followed by a second experience of empowerment and those who maintain that the three elements of Acts 2:38 (repentance, baptism in Jesus’ name, and receiving the Holy Spirit [speaking in tongues]) converge in one act of grace, the new birth.<sup>35</sup>

With the condemnation of the Oneness issue, the fathers and mothers of the Assemblies of God assumed that the restoration of the apostolic faith had been protected from error. In the years that followed, they concentrated on preserving the truths of the revival.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGY

When the General Council (an abbreviated title for the General Council of the Assemblies of God) came into being at Hot Springs, Arkansas, in April 1914, doctrinal consensus already existed among the participants, built on the historic truths of the faith and embellished by Wesleyan Holiness and Keswickian themes. When asked in 1919 what these **Pentecostals** believed, E. N. Bell, a member of the Executive Presbytery and the first general chairman (termed general superintendent later), began his response by saying:

These assemblies are opposed to all radical Higher Criticism of the Bible and against all modernism and infidelity in the Church, against people unsaved and full of sin and worldliness belonging to the church. They believe in all the real Bible truths held by all real Evangelical churches.<sup>36</sup>

However, the first General Council had not been convened to write a new creed or to lay the basis for a new denomination. Kather, the delegates simply adopted the proposed “Preamble and Resolution on Constitution,” depicting their

<sup>34</sup>See chap. 5, pp. 171-76.

<sup>35</sup>David A. Reed, “Oneness Pentecostalism,” in *DPCM*, 650-51.

<sup>36</sup>E. N. Bell, “Questions and Answers,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, 27 December 1919, 5.

concerns and containing several important beliefs, chose officers, and approved incorporation.”

Like other Pentecostals, Assemblies of God members have been characterized by five implicit values: personal **experience**, oral communication (also reflected in testimonials in church magazines, booklets, Sunday school literature, pamphlets, and tracts), spontaneity, otherworldliness, and scriptural authority. All of them are observable in conceptions of leadership, life-style, worship, and church **literature**.<sup>38</sup> These values define much of the uniqueness of Pentecostalism and explain why little emphasis has been placed on the academic treatment of theology.

Editors and writers, therefore, have produced periodicals, books, booklets, tracts, and Sunday school curricula to aid in maturing believers. They have also illustrated the victorious life by recording thousands of testimonies of answered prayers, physical healings, exorcisms, and deliverances from chemical addictions. From the very beginning, the challenge to conserve the work of the Spirit has consumed substantial energies. For that reason, their literature has always exhibited a lay orientation, facilitated by many authors trained in Bible institutes and Bible colleges.

#### PRESERVATION OF DOCTRINE TO 1950

When the Oneness issue threatened to split the General Council at its gathering in 1916, church leaders willingly set aside the anticreedal sentiments of the Hot Springs meeting by drawing doctrinal boundaries to protect the integrity of the Church and welfare of the saints. Several leading ministers, led by Daniel W. Kerr, drafted the Statement of Fundamental Truths; it contained a long section upholding the orthodox view of the Trinity.

But even in taking this stand, the authors qualified it (and themselves):

<sup>37</sup>Edith L. Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism*, vol. 1 (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), 197-213.

<sup>38</sup>Russell P. Spittler, “Theological Style Among Pentecostals and Charismatics,” in *Doing Theology in Today’s World*, ed. John D. Woodbridge and Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 291-318; Walter J. Hollenweger, “Charismatic Renewal in the Third World: Implications for Mission,” *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* [now *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*] 4 (April 1980): 68-75.

The Statement of Fundamental Truths is not intended as a creed for the Church, nor as a basis of fellowship among Christians, but only as a basis of unity for the ministry alone. . . . The human phraseology employed in such statement is not inspired nor contended for, but the truth set forth . . . is held to be essential to a Full Gospel ministry. No claim is made that it contains all biblical truth, only that it covers our need as to these fundamental doctrines."<sup>39</sup>

Oneness ministers subsequently left the Council en masse.<sup>40</sup>

Apart from the lengthy explanation of the Trinity, other points (e.g., "Divine Healing," "Baptism in the Spirit") are remarkably succinct, despite their distinctive character. This corresponds to the impetus surrounding such documents: All **creedal** statements arise from controversy and usually highlight the particular teaching(s) under **contention**.<sup>41</sup>

The Statement of Fundamental Truths, therefore, serves as a framework of doctrine for growth in Christian living and ministry; it was not originally intended to be an outline for a cohesive systematic theology. For example, the section titled "The Fall of Man" naturally mentions that all humankind has fallen into sin; at the same time, however, it allows the reader some liberty to decide the meaning of original sin and the medium of its transmission from generation to **generation**.<sup>42</sup>

In the succeeding years, various approaches aided in the preservation of doctrine. Several reasons motivated these efforts. First, Christians must continue to advance in Spirit-filled living to enhance their effectiveness as witnesses for Christ. When the Executive Presbytery recognized the danger of the anti-Pentecostal annotations in the *Scofield Reference Bible*, they banned its advertisement in the *Pentecostal Evangel* for two years (1924–1926) before they were persuaded that the edifying commentary outweighed the **unedifying**.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>General Council Minutes, **1916, 10-13**. For a United Pentecostal Church perspective, see Arthur L. Clanton, *United We Stand A History of Oneness Organizations* (Hazelwood, Mo.: Pentecostal Publishing House, 1970).

<sup>40</sup>General Council Minutes, **1916, 10**. Significantly the document also mirrors the theology of A. B. Simpson and the Christian and Missionary Alliance; see Nienkirchen, *A.B. Simpson*, 41-50.

<sup>41</sup>Peter Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), ix-xi.

<sup>42</sup>General Council Minutes, 1916, 10.

<sup>43</sup>"A Great Move Forward," *Pentecostal Evangel*, **1** May 1926, 3. See also Gary B. McGee, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached: A History and Theology of the Assemblies of God Foreign Missions to 1959* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1986), 169-71.

Not surprisingly, the denomination's Gospel Publishing House in Springfield, Missouri, produced a considerable variety of popular books with doctrinal themes in addition to Sunday school materials. Examples from this period include *The Phenomena of Pentecost* (1931) by Donald Gee, *Rivers of Living Water* (n.d.) by Stanley H. Frodsham, and *Healing from Heaven* (1926) by Lilian B. Yeomans. Alice Reynolds Flower, a founding mother of the Assemblies of God, began writing Sunday school lessons in the pages of the *Christian Evangel* (later the *Pentecostal Evangel*).<sup>44</sup> Over the course of time, the valuable training opportunities afforded by Sunday schools gained more attention. A textbook on the principles of biblical interpretation came in the translation by P. C. Nelson of Eric Lund's *Hermeneutics* (1938), produced by the Southwestern Press, an **affiliate** of an Assemblies of God Bible institute in Enid, Oklahoma.

For those unable to attend Bible institutes, the plan of redemption could also be studied through the ministry of itinerant evangelists bringing their large (sometimes thirty-foot) dispensational charts and hanging them across church platforms for teaching sessions. The evangelist, with pointer in hand, would then guide the audience across the seven dispensational periods of God's redemptive agenda, explaining biblical truth from the Age of Innocence in the Garden of Eden to the Millennium to **come**.<sup>45</sup> Among those who produced material for this kind of instruction, Finis Jennings Dake was probably the most well-known Pentecostal; in fact, his many publications, including printed lecture notes, books, and the later *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* (1963), have continued to mold the theology of many **Pentecostals**.<sup>46</sup>

Anecdotal accounts of the spiritual life came from the pens of Elizabeth V. Baker, et al., *Chronicles of a Faith Life* (2d ed., ca. 1926); H. A. Baker, *Visions Beyond the Veil* (1938); Robert W. Cummings, *Gethsemane* (1944); and Alice Reynolds Flower, *Love Overflowing* (1928), to cite only a few. Poetry was also taken up as a medium for sharing spiritual

<sup>44</sup>Gary B. McGee, "Flower, Joseph James Roswell and Alice Reynolds," in *DPCM*, 311-13.

<sup>45</sup>J. G. Hall, "The Eternal Program of God of the Ages and Dispensations," color chart (n.d.); also Frank M. Boyd, *Ages and Dispensations* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1955).

<sup>46</sup>Patrick H. Alexander, "Dake, Finis Jennings," in *DPCM*, 235-36; also, Jimmy Swaggart, "In Memory: Finis Jennings Dake, 1902-1987," *Evangelist* (September 1987): 44.

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truths; among the best-known poets were Alice Reynolds Flower and John Wright Follette.

Not surprisingly, songwriters assisted in conveying doctrine. Along with old gospel favorites, congregations were blessed by the songs of Herbert Buffum, such as "The Loveliness of Christ" and "I'm Going Through."<sup>47</sup> The songs of African-American Oneness Pentecostals also found an audience, especially those of Thoro Harris (e.g., "All That Thrills My Soul Is Jesus," "More Abundantly," and "He's Coming Soon") and Bishop Garfield T. Haywood (e.g., "Jesus, the Son of God" and "I See a Crimson Stream of Blood").<sup>48</sup>

A second reason behind the preservation of doctrine is that believers require solid answers in the face of erroneous doctrine. When threats to the faith arose after 1916, the General Council moved quickly to resolve doctrinal questions. When the hermeneutical issue over speaking in tongues as necessary evidence of Spirit baptism resurfaced in 1918, the General Council declared it to be "our distinctive testimony." Furthermore, it adapted Article 6 of the Statement of Fundamental Truths to refer to tongues as the "initial physical sign" (emphasis added).<sup>49</sup> In the next few years, several cogent articles by Kerr appeared in the *Pentecostal Evangel*, among other published responses.<sup>50</sup>

Without amending the Statement, the Council passed by-laws as another way of addressing troublesome issues. In the category "Eschatological Errors," found in Article VIII in the Constitution and Bylaws, several condemned teachings are listed. For example, the doctrine of the "restitution of all things" originated outside the Assemblies of God. Charles Hamilton Pridgeon, a well-known minister in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, proposed in his book *Is Hell Eternal; or Will*

<sup>47</sup>Wayne Warner, "Herbert Buffum," *Assemblies of God Heritage* 6 (Fall 1986): 11-14, 16.

<sup>48</sup>Everett A. Wilson, "Harris, Thoro," in *DPCM*, 347-48; Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Haywood, Garfield Thomas," in *DPCM*, 349-50.

<sup>49</sup>General Council Minutes, 1918, 10; see McGee, "Early Pentecostal Hermeneutics," in *Initial Evidence*, 103-10.

<sup>50</sup>D. W. Kerr, "Do All Speak in Tongues?" *Christian Evangel*, 11 January 1919, 7; id., "Paul's Interpretation of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit," *Christian Evangel*, 24 August 1918, 6; id., "The 'A' or 'An'-Which?" *Pentecostal Evangel*, 21 January 1922, 7; id., "Not Ashamed," *Pentecostal Evangel*, 2 April 1921, 5; id., "The Bible Evidence of the Baptism with the Holy Ghost," *Pentecostal Evangel*, 11 August 1923, 2-3. Other responses may be found in Gary B. McGee "Popular Expositions of Initial Evidence in Pentecostalism," in *Initial Evidence*, 119-130.

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*God's Plan Fail?* (1918) that hell was of limited duration for the purging of sins, after which all humankind would experience the love of God. Pridgeon, a former Presbyterian and advocate of faith-healing, became Pentecostal in the early 1920s and continued teaching this form of universalism. The doctrine was sometimes referred to as the "reconciliation" of all things or simply "Pridgeonism." The General Council condemned it as heretical in 1925. While it is unknown how many Pentecostals accepted Pridgeon's universalism, the threat appeared to warrant official condemnation.<sup>51</sup>

Another issue had to do with the imminent return of Christ: Could a minister subscribe to a post-Tribulation Rapture? When Benjamin A. Baur applied to the Eastern District in the mid-1930s for credentials, the presbyters refused his application, saying that his view diminished the nearness of the Lord's return. According to his view, Christians would have to endure the entire seven years of the Tribulation Period, particularly the last three-and-a-half years, the time of the "Great Wrath," before Christ returned for His church. Although some of the district presbyters embraced a mid-Tribulation Rapture, Bauer's view remained suspect despite his voluminous written defense of it. The 1937 General Council approved a motion noting its potential problems for Christian living in the present, since Christians might become complacent if told that Christ's return was not imminent. However: reflecting the interest of early Pentecostals in avoiding division and quibbling over fine points of doctrine, the new bylaw allowed ministers to believe in a post-Tribulation Rapture, but not to preach or teach it. (In the end, Baur did not receive credentials and remained outside the General Council.<sup>52</sup>)

A third reason behind the preservation of doctrine is that Pentecostals have struggled to balance biblical teaching with their religious experience. Committed to the Reformation principle of biblical authority ("only Scripture") as the standard for faith and practice, they have nonetheless experienced the temptation to elevate personal revelations and other spiritual manifestations to the same level. This struggle is reflected in an early *Pentecostal Evangel* report, describing the expectations of Frank M. Boyd as an early Bible school educator and instructor at Central Bible Institute (College after 1965):

<sup>51</sup>Gary B. McGee, "Pridgeon, Charles Hamilton," in *DPCM*, 727.

<sup>52</sup>Interview with Joseph R. Flower, general secretary of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri, 27 April 1988.

[H]e expected all the students to be more filled with fire and love and zeal and more filled with the Spirit when they left than when they came. He said that when men had the Word without the Spirit they were often dead and dull and dry; and when men had the Spirit without the Word there is always a tendency towards fanaticism. But where men had the Word and the Spirit, they would be equipped as the Master wants His ministers **equipped**.<sup>53</sup>

This challenge to instruct believers on how to have a mature Spirit-filled life helps to explain the high priority given to publishing.

Detailed doctrinal handbooks, however, did not appear until the 1920s and **1930s**. **One of the best known, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible* (1937), was compiled from the lecture notes of Myer Pearlman, an instructor at Central Bible Institute. Theologian Russell P. Spittler suggests that it is “the theological jewel of classical Pentecostalism’s middle period.”**<sup>54</sup> Other books having similar agendas appeared, such as S. A. Jamieson’s *Pillars of Truth* (1926), P. C. Nelson’s *Bible Doctrines* (1934), and Ernest S. Williams’ three-volume *Systematic Theology* (1953; *although* organized as a systematic theology, it is more accurately a doctrinal manual composed of the author’s lecture notes delivered at Central Bible Institute from 1929–1949). Specialized studies on the Holy Spirit included *What Meaneth This?* (1947) by Carl Brumback and *The Spirit Himself* (1949) by Ralph M. Riggs. In a related development, Boyd prepared books of doctrinal instruction for correspondence courses, founding what is now Berean College of the Assemblies of God.

On another front, Alice E. **Luce**, a missionary to India and later to Hispanics in America, guided the General Council in articulating its theology and strategy of world missions. She was the **first** missiologist of stature in the Assemblies of God; her three articles on Paul’s missionary methods in the *Pentecostal Evangel* in early 1921 prepared the way for the Assemblies of God’s acceptance of a detailed commitment to indigenous church principles; this occurred officially that year at the General Council meeting in September. **Luce**, who received her theological training at Cheltenham Ladies’ College (England), also wrote several books, numerous articles

<sup>53</sup>“Opening of the Central Bible Institute,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, 25 October 1924, 8.

<sup>54</sup>Spittler, “Theological Style,” in *Doing Theology*, 298.

in both Spanish and English, lecture notes, and Sunday school lessons. <sup>55</sup>

#### PRESERVATION OF DOCTRINE AFTER 1950

With the coming of a new generation and interest in improving the quality of training in the denomination’s Bible and liberal arts colleges, teachers received encouragement to further their education. This began a gradual transition in Bible and theology department personnel: to instructors with graduate degrees in biblical studies, systematic theology, and church history and equipped with sharper skills in **hermeneutics**, Old Testament, New Testament, theology, and the historical development of doctrine and **practice**.<sup>56</sup>

Although many had long feared the intellectualizing of the faith, this new breed of teachers modeled the balance between Pentecostal spirituality and academic studies. One such professor, Stanley M. Horton, had received training in biblical languages and Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Harvard Divinity School, and Central Baptist Theological Seminary.<sup>57</sup> Over the years, Horton has had a significant effect on the denomination through his teaching, books (e.g., *What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit* [1976]), magazine and journal articles, and contributions to the adult Sunday school curriculum.

With increasing expertise, educators began to explore in greater **depth the** distinctive beliefs of the Assemblies of God. Many of them joined the Society for Pentecostal Studies, an academic society founded in **1970**, and have contributed articles to its journal, *Pneuma Paraclete* (began in 1967), the denominational journal, has provided another opportunity for scholarly discussion, although until 1992 it was confined to pneumatology. A more short-lived source for theological opinion within the General Council appeared with the publication of *Agora* (1977–1981), an independent quarterly magazine.

Scholarly studies relevant to the person and work of the Holy Spirit include *Commentary on the First Epistle to the*

<sup>55</sup>Alice E. Luce, “Paul’s Missionary Methods,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, 8 January 1921, 6–7; 22 January 1921, 6, 11; 5 February 1921, 6–7. Gary B. McGee, “Luce, Alice Eveline,” in *DPCM*, 543–44.

<sup>56</sup>Gary B. McGee, “The Indispensable Calling of the Pentecostal Scholar,” *Assemblies of God Educator* 35 (July to September, 1990): 1, 3–5, 16.

<sup>57</sup>Gary B. McGee, “Horton, Stanley Monroe,” in *DPCM*, 446–47.

*Corinthians* by Gordon D. Fee (1987), *The Book of Acts* (1981) by Stanley M. Horton, and *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (1984) by Roger Stronstad (a minister in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada). Examinations of specific issues related to the Pentecostal heritage can be found in *The Spirit Helps Us Pray: A Biblical Theology of Prayer* (1993) by Robert L. Brandt and Zenas J. Bicket; *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* (1991) by Murray Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Peterson, eds.; *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism* (1991) by Gary B. McGee, ed.; *Power Encounter A Pentecostal Perspective* (1989) by Opal L. Reddin, ed.; and *The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic* (1992) by Eldin Villafañe.

Nonetheless, apart from the new line of collegiate textbooks offered by Logion Press (Gospel Publishing House), the denominational priority given to popularly written materials still prevails. The recently published *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (1993) by William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton represents a new survey of beliefs for adult Sunday school classes or undergraduate courses. The myriad of Assemblies of God publications produced by Gospel Publishing House and Life Publishers International still focus most of their attention on Bible study, discipleship, and practical studies for ministers. This is also true of ICI University and Berean College publications, both offering credit and non-credit programs by correspondence to laypersons as well as to candidates for professional ministry.

Other publications from various presses include another academic survey of doctrine, *An Introduction to Theology: A Classical Pentecostal Perspective* (1993) by John R. Higgins, Michael L. Dusing, and Frank D. Tallman, and the popularly written *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* (1928, rev. ed. 1972) and *Trophimus I Left Sick* (1952) by Donald Gee; two booklets titled *Living Your Christian Life NOW in the Light of Eternity* (1960) by H. B. Kelchner; *Divine Healing and the Problem of Suffering* (1976) by Jesse K. Moon; *Dunamis and the Church* (1968) by Henry H. Ness; and *The Spirit—God in Action* (1974) by Anthony D. Palma. Less didactic treatments on the spiritual life have been made available in books such as *Pentecost in My Soul* (1989) by Edith L. Blumhofer. Likewise, personal memoirs, such as *The Spirit Bade Me Go* (1961) by David J. du Plessis, *Grace for Grace* (1961) by Alice Reynolds Flower, and *Although the Fig Tree Shall*

*Not Blossom* (1976) by Daena Cargnel, have sparked interest due to their emphasis on the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. Additional inspiration and teaching of this nature is provided by the weekly *Pentecostal Evangel* and by *Advance*, a monthly magazine for ministers.

Songwriters continued sharing their gifts for worship and instruction. One of the best known, Ira Stanphill, warmed the hearts of churchgoers with songs like “Mansion Over the Hilltop,” “Room at the Cross,” and “I Know Who Holds Tomorrow,” designed to provide comfort and the assurance of God’s grace.<sup>58</sup> So influential have composers been from the beginning of the Pentecostal movement that while most Pentecostals have never learned the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed, they can sing an astonishing number of such songs and choruses from memory, obvious testimony that much Pentecostal theology has been transmitted orally.

By the 1970s, the Assemblies of God had become one of the major denominations in the United States-linked to even larger fraternal constituencies overseas. Facing new problems, church leaders chose the method of publishing position papers to address issues troubling the churches; in this way they continued to respond to issues, but without adding more bylaws to the constitution or amending the Statement of Fundamental Truths. Beginning in 1970, with the publication of “The Inerrancy of Scripture” (with its endorsement by the General Presidency), over twenty such white papers have been issued. Topics have included divine healing, creation, transcendental meditation, divorce and remarriage, the initial physical evidence of Spirit baptism, abortion, the kingdom of God, and women in ministry.<sup>59</sup> In recent years, members of the denomination’s Doctrinal Purity Commission, established in 1979 to monitor theological developments, have prepared the papers.

Obviously, the use of position papers has begun to broaden the confessional identity of the Assemblies of God. Resorting to position papers, however, has not been accomplished without some **disagreement**.<sup>60</sup> The authoritative weight of position

<sup>58</sup>Wayne E. Warner, “Stanphill, Ira,” in *DPCM*, 810.

<sup>59</sup>The position papers through 1989 are bound together in *Where We Stand* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1990). A recent paper on women in ministry is available separately and will be included in the next edition.

<sup>60</sup>Charles B. Nestor, “Position Papers,” *Agora* (Winter 1979): 10-11.



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papers in relation to that of the Statement of Fundamental Truths leaves room for discussion. Furthermore, at least one paper could be interpreted as a shift from an original understanding in the Statement when it mentions that some "have tried to set divine healing in opposition to or in competition with the medical profession. This need not be so. Physicians through their skills have brought help to many." Furthermore, Christians cannot reverse the physical effects of the Fall since "no matter what we do for this body, no matter how many times we are healed, if Jesus tarries we shall die."<sup>61</sup>

By the 1940s, many conservative evangelicals realized that theological agreements with Pentecostals outweighed differences and began to welcome their fellowship and cooperation. The Assemblies of God's accepting membership in the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) at its founding in 1942 represented their entry into the mainstream of American church life (which was furthered by an upward social and economic mobility after World War II). The relationship became tenuous at times due to lingering suspicions about Assemblies of God pneumatology and the generally Arminian nature of its theological anthropology. Nevertheless, the impact of evangelicalism on the theology of Pentecostalism has been considerable.<sup>62</sup>

After the election of Thomas F. Zimmerman as president of the NAE (1960–1962), the General Council in 1961 made a few modifications of the Statement of Fundamental Truths. The most significant revision occurred in the section "The Scriptures Inspired." The 1916 version reads as follows: "The Bible is the inspired Word of God, a revelation from God to man, the infallible rule of faith and conduct, and is superior to conscience and reason, but not contrary to reason." The altered wording aligned more closely with that of evangelicals in the NAE: "The Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct." Constituents of the Assemblies of God have believed in the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture since the found-

<sup>61</sup>"Divine healing: An Integral Part of the Gospel," *Where We Stand*, 53, 51. Cf., Lilian B. Yeomans, M.D., *Healing from Heaven* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1926; rev. ed., 1973).

<sup>62</sup>Harold Lindsell, ed., *The Church's Worldwide Mission* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1966), 8. For a discussion of the impact of the NAE on Pentecostals, see Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "National Association of Evangelicals," in *DPCM*, 634–36.

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ing of the General Council. Yet whether Pentecostals have a unique contribution to make to the understanding of the inspiration of Scripture as "God-breathed" (Gk. *theopneustos*) remains to be explored.<sup>63</sup>

The historic Reformed theology of most evangelicals, both inside and outside the NAE, has continued to raise objections to the Wesleyan and Keswickian understandings of a separate work of grace following conversion—the theological foundation on which classical Pentecostals have built their doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.<sup>64</sup> This scholarly stand-off, noted for its criticism of the exegetical basis for tongues as initial evidence, has remained through the years. In response, two charismatic scholars have made important contributions to the classical Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit baptism: Howard Ervin (American Baptist), *Conversion-Znitation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (1984), and J. Rodman Williams (Presbyterian), *Renewal Theology*, especially volume 2 (1990). Assemblies of God theologians have also produced important studies.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps most substantially, evangelical scholars have **Munenced** Pentecostal beliefs concerning the present and future aspects of the kingdom of God, a concept only alluded to in the Statement of Fundamental Truths. For many years, the teaching about future events in the Assemblies of God had a

<sup>63</sup>General Council Minutes, 1916, 10. General Council Minutes, 1961, 92. For the significance of the change of wording in the statement on Scripture, see Gerald T. Sheppard, "Scripture in the Pentecostal Tradition," (Part 1), *Agora* (Spring 1978): 4–5, 17–22; (Part 2) (Summer 1978): 14–19.

<sup>64</sup>Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970).

<sup>65</sup>William W. Menzies, "The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology: An Essay on Hermeneutics," in *Essays on Apostolic Themes*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), 1–22; Ben Aker, "New Directions in Lucan Theology: Reflections on Luke 3:21–22 and Some Implications," in *Faces of Renewal*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 108–27; Donald A. Johns, "Some New Directions in the Hermeneutics of Classical Pentecostalism's Doctrine of Initial Evidence," in *Initial Evidence*, 145–56; William G. MacDonald, *Glossolalia in the New Testament* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, ca. 1964); Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 83–119. For the current debate, see Roger Stranstad, "The Biblical Precedent for Historical Precedent," paper presented to the 22d annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Springfield, Mo., November 1992, and the response of Gordon D. Fee at the same meeting, "Response to Roger Stranstad," both published in *Paraclete* 27 (Summer 1993): 1–14.



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strong dispensational orientation (i.e., a shared belief in seven dispensations, pre-Tribulation Rapture, and premillennial interpretation of Scripture, but setting aside a core teaching which separates the Church from Israel). This was popularized and reinforced by the writings of Riggs, Boyd, Dake, Brumback, John G. Hall, and T. J. Jones. New Testament references to the “kingdom of God” (briefly defined as the rule or reign of God) as a present reality in the hearts of the redeemed barely received notice, while its future millennial appearance received extensive consideration.”

According to historic dispensationalism, the promise of David’s restored kingdom had been postponed to the Millennium because the Jews had rejected Jesus’ offer of the Kingdom. This delayed the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy of the restoration of Israel and the outpouring of the Spirit until after the second coming of Christ. The events in Acts 2, therefore, represented only an initiatory blessing of power to the Early Church. Israel and the Church were logically kept separate; hence, the underlying anti-Pentecostal posture of this system of interpretation of Scripture.<sup>67</sup>

For Pentecostals, however, Joel’s prophecy had been fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, as evidenced by Peter’s “This is that” (Acts 2:16, KJV). Unfortunately, Pentecostals’ deference to dispensationalism bridled their pursuit of the implications of some references to the Kingdom and their claims of apostolic power in the last days (see Matthew 9:35; 24:14; Acts 8:12; and 1 Corinthians 4:20, among others).

Certain theologians, notably Ernest S. Williams and Stanley M. Horton, did clearly identify the kingdom of God with the Church (“spiritual Israel”), recognizing the vital connection

“John G. Hall, *Dispensations*, 2d ed. (Springfield, Mo.: Inland Printing Co., 1957); D. V. Hurst and T. J. Jones, *The Church Begins* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1959); Carl Brumback, *What Meaneth This?* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1947); cf. Gerald T. Sheppard, “Pentecostalism and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism: Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship,” *Pneuma* 6 (Fall 1984): 5-33.

<sup>67</sup>Dr. C. I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1896), 5-12; and the later Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965). See also Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987); French L. Arrington, “Hermeneutics, Historical Perspectives on Pentecostal and Charismatic,” DPCM, 376-89.

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to their belief about the Spirit’s contemporary activity in the Church.<sup>68</sup>

After World War II, evangelicals renewed their study of theological and missiological implications of the kingdom of God, with Pentecostals’ interest in the Kingdom gradually paralleling that of evangelicals. The well-known Assemblies of God missiologist Melvin L. Hodges recognized the importance of the Kingdom for understanding a New Testament theology of mission. Speaking at the Congress on the Church’s Worldwide Mission at Wheaton College in April 1966, he declared the Church to be “the present manifestation of the kingdom of God in the earth, or at least, the agency that prepares the way for the future manifestation of the Kingdom. Its mission therefore is the extension of the Church throughout the world. ... It is the Holy Spirit that gives life to the Church and imparts gifts and ministries as well as power for their performance.”<sup>69</sup> Although short of elaboration, Hodges’ message indicated an important trend was afoot. The vital connection between the “signs and wonders” of the advancing Kingdom (power manifestations of the Spirit associated with the preaching of the gospel) awaited further exposition.

Some twenty years later, retired missionary Ruth A. Breusch laid out the implications for Pentecostal ministry in *Mountain Movers*, the foreign missions magazine of the Assemblies of God (again, showing the priority of discipling persons in the pew). In a series of ten articles under the theme “The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory,” Breusch, a graduate (B.A., M.A.) of Hartford Seminary Foundation, showed thoughtful New Testament interpretation and familiarity with missiological literature. She defined the Kingdom as the rule of God encompassing “the Church as the realm of God’s blessings into which His people have entered. The Church is comprised of those who are rescued from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God’s Son.” Accordingly, “this Church is the New Israel, the people of God, under the new covenant. ‘New’ because Gentile believers are now included.”

<sup>68</sup>Ernest S. Williams, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), 95; id., “Thy Kingdom Come,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, 3 1 July 1966, 8; Stanley M. Horton, *The Promise of His Coming* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1967), 9 1; for a historical perspective, see Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now! The Premillenarian Response to Russia and Israel since 1917* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977).

<sup>69</sup>Melvin L. Hodges, “Mission-And Church Growth,” in *The Church’s Worldwide Mission*, ed. Lindsell, 141, 145.

By God's choice, the Church is the vehicle for the extension of His kingdom throughout the earth. To Breusch, the advent of the Spirit reflects His redemptive nature by dynamically empowering the Church for the evangelization of the world.<sup>70</sup>

This attention to studying the biblical concept of the kingdom of God has contributed to a better understanding of the ethical teachings of the Gospels, the nature and mission of the Church, the meaning of signs and wonders in evangelism, and the role of the Christian in society.

Other writers on a more academic plane have hailed the importance of the kingdom of God in the study of Scripture. Peter Kuzmič, for example, noted in a recent publication,

Pentecostals and charismatics are convinced ... that "the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power" (1 Cor. 4:20), and expect that the preaching of the Word of God be accompanied by mighty acts of the Holy Spirit. ... For the followers of Jesus who believe the "whole/full gospel," the commission to preach the good news of the kingdom of God is linked with the equipping power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the forces of evil. ...

... In the age of rationalism, theological liberalism, religious pluralism, Pentecostals and charismatics believe that evidential supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit validates the Christian witness. As in the apostolic days, the Holy Spirit is the very life of the church and its mission, not replacing but always exalting Christ the Lord. This is the Spirit's primary mission and the way in which the kingdom of God is actualized in the believing community. Christ rules where the Spirit moves!"

Furthermore, Kuzmič and Murray W. Dempster, among others, forthrightly speak to the implications of the Kingdom for Christian social ethics.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup>Ruth A. Breusch, "The Church and the Kingdom," *Mountain Movers*, July 1987, 9.

<sup>71</sup>"Kingdom of God" by Peter Kuzmič Taken from the book *The Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* edited by Stanley M. Burgess, Gary B. McGee, and Patrick Alexander. Copyright © 1988 by Stanley M. Burgess, Gary B. McGee, and Patrick Alexander. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>72</sup>Peter Kuzmič, "History and Eschatology: Evangelical Views," in *Word and Deed*; ed. Bruce J. Nicholls (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1985), 135-64; Murray W. Dempster, "Evangelism, Social Concern, and the Kingdom of God," in *Called and Empowered Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. Murray Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Peterson (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 22-43. For a helpful study of Assemblies of God responses to key social issues, see Howard N. Kenyon, "An Analysis of Ethical Issues in the History of the Assemblies of God" (Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, 1988).

Recently, some Pentecostals and charismatics have advocated several forms of "Kingdom Now" theology, which in some quarters has represented a departure from the traditional pre-Tribulation Rapture view and/or premillennial interpretation of the Bible. Focusing on Christianizing society now and dismissing or minimizing the emphasis on the rapture of the Church (but not necessarily the second coming of Christ), this teaching has generated serious controversy.<sup>73</sup> The mere fact that these perspectives have developed demonstrates that contemporary Pentecostals are concerned about discovering their responsibilities as Christians in society.

Today, references to the kingdom of God abound in Assemblies of God publications. The values for the continuing study of cherished doctrines may be profound and far-reaching, reminding Pentecostals of the riches in God's Word.

#### CONCLUSION

Pentecostalism emerged out of the nineteenth-century Holiness movement. The formulation of the full gospel, concern for world evangelization in the closing days of history, and intense prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit precipitated the revivals at Topeka, Los Angeles, and the many that followed.

The Pentecostal and charismatic movements in this century have indicated that something of unusual significance has occurred at this point in the history of the Church: God has been pouring out the Holy Spirit on Christians everywhere who are seeking a Spirit-filled life characterized by holiness and spiritual power. Spirit baptism's divine empowerment bestows insight into the Spirit's activity in the world, greater sensitivity to His promptings, a new dimension of prayer, and spiritual power to achieve their tasks in mission.

When independent Pentecostals organized the General Council in 1914, they did so to expedite their goal of winning the world for Christ. The urgency and problems of the hour dictated cooperation among the Spirit-baptized. Church leaders recognized the importance of Bible study and doctrine

<sup>73</sup>See *Where We Stand*, 185-94; William A. Griffin, "Kingdom Now: New Hope or New Heresy?" paper presented to the seventeenth annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Virginia Beach, Virginia, 14 November 1987; Gordon Anderson, "Kingdom Now Theology: A Look at Its Roots and Branches," *Paraclete* (Summer 1990): 1-12; and "Kingdom Now Doctrines Which Differ from Assemblies of God Teaching," *Paraclete* 24 (Summer 1990): 19-24.

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to protect congregations from error, but more significantly to equip believers “for the work of the ministry” (Eph. 4:12, **KJV**).

The development of doctrine in the denomination has taken several forms: the Preamble, Statement of Fundamental Truths, bylaws, position papers, articles and editorials in magazines, tracts, books, Sunday school curricula, songs, and poetry. From Sunday school teachers to the song leader, pastor, and denominational officer-everyone is called to proclaim the good news of salvation, to share the compassion of Jesus Christ, and to disciple converts.

With the delay in the Lord’s return and the changing cultural context bringing ever new challenges to the faith, scholarly responses to theological issues have gained greater appreciation. Correspondingly, the growing identification with evangelicalism has led to an increasing reflection on the distinctiveness of Pentecostal beliefs. Since World War II, evangelical interest in the biblical teaching on the kingdom of God has enriched the study of doctrine in the Assemblies of God.

The contemporary scene calls the Church to consider anew its faithfulness to God and its mission in the world. Prayerful and exacting study of the Scriptures, theology, missiology, and church history, therefore, constitutes an important gift of the risen Christ to His church.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why must any study of modern Pentecostalism include the views of John Wesley on sanctification?
2. What did the Keswick movement and Reformed revivalists such as Dwight L. Moody and Reuben A. Torrey believe about the baptism in the Holy Spirit?
3. Why did belief in divine healing find such a warm reception in the Holiness movement?
4. **Why** did concern for world evangelism play such an important role in the emergence of the Pentecostal movement?
5. In what ways did early **Pentecostals** believe that the New Testament Church was being restored?
6. What were the legacies of Charles F. **Parham** and William J. Seymour? How did they affect the Pentecostal movement?
7. Discuss the **first** three issues to divide the Pentecostal movement.

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8. Why has the Assemblies of God placed such a high priority on publishing popular-level materials?

9. After the approval of the Statement of Fundamental Truths in 1916, how did the General Council address questionable teachings?

10. What is the underlying argument against **Pentecostalism** in historic dispensationalism?

11. How has the growing identity with evangelicalism influenced Assemblies of God theology?

12. What service does the study of theology perform for the Assemblies of God at this point in its history?

## **CHAPTER TWO**

# ***Theological Foundations***

***James H. Railey, Jr.***

***Benny C. Aker***

Good theology is written by those who are careful to allow their perspectives to be shaped by the biblical revelation. Therefore, throughout this book we shall keep in mind the following biblical assertions: God exists, He has revealed himself, and He has made that revelation available to humankind.<sup>1</sup>

In the Bible we see God coming down into the stream of human life and history to carry out His great plan of redemption. In other words, the Bible presents its truths in the midst of historical situations, rather than giving us a systematized list of what it teaches. Yet its teachings need to be systematized for greater understanding and for application to our lives.\*

That systematizing must, however, be done very carefully, paying attention to both the context and content of the biblical material being used. The subtle temptation is for theologians to select only texts that agree with their positions, ignoring others that seem to disagree, and to use texts without proper concern for their context. The Bible must be allowed to speak with clarity, unclouded by the preconceptions and misconceptions of the individual.

Another biblical assertion guiding the development of the material in this book is that the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Bible guides the mind and heart of the believer (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit's work in assisting the student to understand the Bible is, however, not to be feared as a work that will lead into bizarre interpretations previously

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<sup>1</sup>See chap. 3, pp. 62-69.

The beginnings of systematization can be seen in some books, especially in Romans.

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unknown. In fact, "when the Spirit guides into all truth, it is actually a matter of bringing forth or eliciting what is already known." Moreover, "there can be no basic difference between the truth the Christian community knows through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and what is set forth in Scripture."<sup>3</sup>

**Pentecostals** have a rich heritage in the realm of experience, and have had fervent convictions with respect to their faith, but have not been as ready to write down explanations of their experiences with the truths of the Bible. Now, however, there is a growing body of literature from the Pentecostal perspective which will continue the effort to expand understanding between the various groups within the Church. We trust this book will also provide further testimony to the items of faith dear to the experience of the faithful.

Again, we recognize that only the Bible has the final word in that it is the Word of God. All merely human words are at best tentative, being true only in so far as they **align** with the revelation of the Bible. We are not a cadre of superior believers who reach from their lofty heights to assist those of inferior development along the way. Rather, we are fellow travelers along the path of life who desire to share what we have learned about God and His dealings. The call is to those who read to come along and let us learn together about the riches of our Lord.

## THE NATURE OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION

The place to begin thinking about systematic theology is with an understanding of the concept of religion. Although religion can be defined in various ways, one of the simpler definitions is that religion is the search for the ultimate. Human beings almost universally acknowledge that there is something, or someone, beyond themselves and that in some way, or ways, they are responsible to that something or someone. The recognition that the human race is not alone in the universe and is dependent, at least to some extent, on the ultimate which is beyond is the starting place for religion.

Religion has taken many forms and expressions throughout human history—from philosophical speculation to the creation of gods in the form of material objects (see Rom. 1:21—

<sup>3</sup>J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 22–23.

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23). The incessant longing after the ultimate has led to religious practices ranging from intellectual discussion to child sacrifice.

However, this longing of the individual, either alone or in society, should not be discounted or considered a negative factor. The church father Augustine (A.D. 354–430) confessed, "You have made us for yourself **and** our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you." **That is, the longing after the ultimate is the gift of God within persons so that they will be open to the revelation of God. He alone is the ultimate One who will be the full answer to the searching heart.**

**Religion as the human search for God, however, fails to provide anything or anyone truly ultimate. At best the searching ends with some lesser deity, or explanation for existence, which, because it is but the creation of the human mind, is not sufficient to answer all of the complexities of human existence. Religion ends in the frustration of not being able to conceive of a god who is big enough.**

**But this frustration is not the end of the story, for once people begin to sense futility, it can be the fertile soil in which reception of the revelation of God can grow. H. Orton Wiley, the late Nazarene theologian, notes that "religion furnishes the basic consciousness in man without which there could be no capacity in human nature to receive the revelation of God."<sup>5</sup> That is, the very fact people are seeking after something can provide the opportunity to present them with the good news. They can find what they are seeking in Jesus Christ. He not only brings salvation, but also reveals the majesty and immensity of God that more than satisfies the search for the ultimate. Most important, the seeker finds that God himself has been searching for His wandering creation all along!**

## TYPES OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

**When religion accepts the revelation of God in Christ, the issue of authority rises to prominence. What are the grounds for belief and practice? How does the revelation of God come to bear upon the individual? These questions direct our attention to the issue of authority.**

<sup>4</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, vol. 18, translated by John K. Ryan (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1960), 43.

<sup>5</sup>H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, vol. 1 (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1940), 17.

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The authority question, which really asks how the **revelation** of God bears on the way people live and conduct their lives, can be divided broadly into two categories: external and internal authority. Both categories take seriously the role of the Bible as the revelation of God, but differ dramatically in various ways.

External authority includes those authoritative sources that are outside of the individual: usually expressed as canonical, theological, and ecclesiastical.

**Canonical Authority.** Canonical authority holds that the biblical materials, as contained in the **canon**<sup>6</sup> of Scripture, are God's authoritative revelation. The Bible speaks to our beliefs and life-style with clarity and finality. The proponents of this view assert that (1) the Bible is authoritative because of its divine authorship and (2) the Bible is clear in the basic truths it presents. All questions of faith and conduct are subject to the scrutiny of the Bible, so that items of theological belief must have either explicit or implicit biblical support or be dismissed.<sup>7</sup>

An important consideration for proponents of the canonical view of authority is that the Bible must be properly interpreted. This issue faces the canonical view of authority and must be dealt with **carefully**.<sup>8</sup>

**Theological Authority.** *The* theological view of authority looks to the doctrinal confessions, or creeds, of the community at large as the source of faith and practice. From its beginning the Church has stated its beliefs in formulas and creeds. One of the earliest is the Apostles' Creed, so named because it claimed to summarize the teachings of the apostles. Throughout the history of the Church many other statements of faith have been adopted and used by believers to affirm the central tenets of their faith.

There is a value to the Church in these **creedal** statements because they serve to focus the attention of the worshiper upon crucial elements of belief. They allow the watching

<sup>6</sup>The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven of the New Testament; see chap. 3, pp. 107-09, for more on the canon.

<sup>7</sup>Most cults have additional books they consider authoritative. We hold that the Bible alone is authoritative.

<sup>8</sup>See chap. 3.

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world to hear a clear and united voice explaining the theology of the historic Christian Church."

But the problem with the theological view of authority is that it tends to elevate **creedal** affirmations to an importance above that of the Bible. Also, even though they do show remarkable unity in key aspects of biblical truth, they may vary to a considerable extent in secondary matters of faith and practice. To the extent that they align with the Bible and serve to explain its truths, they are valuable. When they supplant the central place of biblical revelation they are a questionable authoritative source.

**Ecclesiastical Authority.** Ecclesiastical authority holds that the Church itself must be the final authority in all matters of faith and practice. Usually this understanding is held in conjunction with the canonical and theological views previously considered. The Bible is granted an important place, but it must be interpreted by those who are specially trained and chosen for that task. The interpretation, then, of the Church, usually promulgated in creedlike statements, becomes the authoritative one.

Often this ecclesiastical understanding of the authority is expressed through the earthly official head of a church, whether one person or a group of persons. Because they are in leadership positions within the community, it is assumed that they are in the proper relationship to God to communicate His truth to the Church.

Without in any way detracting from God-given leadership positions, it must be observed that this approach to authority is open to a good deal of corruption—the misuse of power for selfish or other sinful desires. Moreover, the interpretation of Scripture is usually done by only a few people on the behalf of the whole Church. This keeps the majority of believers from confronting the biblical claims for themselves.

The issue of the authoritative source for understanding the revelation of God can also be considered from the internal perspective—tiding the authority source within the individual. Then, the external approaches which have been **pre-**

<sup>9</sup>The Assemblies of God has articulated a Statement of Fundamental Truths containing sixteen truths considered to be essential for establishing and maintaining fellowship within its membership. The Bible, however, is still considered the ultimate authority. For a full treatment see William W. Menzies, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. Stanley M. Horton (Springfield, Mo.: Logion Press, 1993).

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sented are considered at best secondary to factors at work in the individual person.

**Experience as an Authority.** The first internal authority source is that of experience. The individual relates to the revelation of God in the arena of the mind, the will, and the emotions. Considering the person as a unity, the effects in any of those areas are felt, or experienced, in the others either subsequently or simultaneously. In effect, the revelation of God comes to bear upon the totality of the human person.

Many, however, take this observation further, contending that experience is the real source of authority for faith and practice. They say only those truths that have been experienced as true by the individual can be accepted and proclaimed as true for others.

The contemporary elevation of experience to authority status began with the writings of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834).<sup>10</sup> Schleiermacher argued that the ground of Christianity was religious experience, an experience which became the authoritative determinant for theological truths. From his time to the present, experience has been accepted as the source of authority in some sectors of the Church.”

Although Schleiermacher and his followers treated the Bible as an ordinary human book and overemphasized experience, the value of experience in grasping the revelation of God must not be overlooked. This is especially true for Pentecostals, who place great emphasis upon the reality of a relationship with God that **affects** every aspect of the human being. Propositional truths take on vitality and force when they are confirmed and illustrated in the living experiences of devout disciples of Christ.

On the other hand, experiences vary and their causation is not always clearly discernible. A reliable authority source must be beyond the variables which mark experience, and must even be able to contradict and correct experience if

<sup>10</sup>For a good evaluation of the life and work of Schleiermacher see Richard R. Niebuhr, “Friedrich Schleiermacher,” in *A Handbook of Christian Theologians*, ed. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1965), 17–35. See also Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Harper, 1963).

“The philosophical school of existentialism (promoted especially by Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger) says the only way to truth is through our subjective experience of and participation in reality. This influenced neoorthodoxy and much of recent antisupernaturalism in theology (as in Rudolf Bultmann).

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need be. Experience alone as an authoritative source mediating the revelation of God to people is not reliable.<sup>12</sup>

**Human Reason as an Authority.** With the Age of Enlightenment (from the late seventeenth century onward) many have made human reason the self-sufficient source of authority. This rationalism says it does not need divine revelation and, in fact, denies the reality of divine revelation. Colin Brown accurately notes that in “everyday language rationalism has come to mean the attempt to judge everything in the light of **reason**.”<sup>13</sup> The results of the rise of rationalism have been felt in all areas of human endeavor, but especially in religion and theology.”

Our intellectual powers are a part of what it means to be created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, to employ reason in the reception of the revelation of God is not in itself wrong. Tremendous advances have been made by the use of reason as it applies to many problem areas of human existence. Applying reason to biblical materials, researching ancient texts and documents, reconstructing the social and economic world of the Bible, and many other such efforts, have been helpful in carrying forward an understanding of the revelation of God.

Reason, then, is a good servant of the revelation of God, but it is not a good master over that revelation. When reason is assumed to be authoritative it stands above the revelation of God and judges which, if any, of it should be accepted. Usually rationalists make their own human reason the real **authority**.<sup>15</sup> It should be noted also that human reason that denies divine revelation has always come under the influence of sin and Satan ever since Adam’s fall (Gen. 3).

Our belief, therefore, is that theology is done best when the Bible is acknowledged as the authority and the Holy Spirit

<sup>12</sup>For a good treatment of the role of religious experience and how it influences theology see John Jefferson Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 145–68.

<sup>13</sup>Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1974), 48.

<sup>14</sup>For a discussion of rationalism see Colin Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas and Movements*, vol. 1, *From the Ancient World to the Age of Enlightenment* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1990), 173–96.

<sup>15</sup>Dr. Stanley M. Horton relates that one of his professors at Harvard University, Robert Pfeiffer, made a statement in class contradicting something stated in the Bible. When the students asked what was the authority for his statement, Pfeiffer pointed to his own head.

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is allowed to mediate the revealed Word of God to us. **Creedal affirmations** and other statements of the Church are valuable aids in interpreting and applying the Bible. The experience of individuals, especially those which are prompted and directed by the Holy Spirit, and human reason, also, assist the believer in understanding the revelation. Nevertheless, the Bible alone is the sufficient rule for faith and practice. In it God spoke and speaks.

## A DEFINITION OF THEOLOGY

Theology, simply defined, is a study of God and His relationship to all that He has created. We believe it must be derived from the revelation of God in the Bible, for in no other way could it be a reliable testimony for those who are searching after truth.

Not only does the biblical revelation direct the theologian to the items which must be believed, it also sets the outer limits of belief; theology must **affirm** as required belief only what the Bible either explicitly or implicitly teaches. Theology must also be vitally concerned about interpreting the Bible correctly and applying it properly.

While the source for theology is the biblical material, theology is also concerned about the community of faith from which that revelation comes and the community into which the message is going. Without understanding the ancient community, the message will not be heard clearly and accurately; without understanding the modern community, the message **will** not be applied properly. This dual concern may be brought out by defining theology as a discipline striving "to give a coherent statement" of the teachings of the Bible, "placed in the context of culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to issues of **life**."<sup>16</sup> It has been further defined as "systematic reflection on scripture ... and the mission of the Church in mutual relation, with scripture as the **norm**."<sup>17</sup> Theology is a living, dynamic discipline, not because its authoritative source changes, but because it is always striving to communicate the timeless truths to the ever-changing world.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 21.

<sup>17</sup>Davis, *Foundations*, 43.

<sup>18</sup>For a discussion of the way the meaning and usage of the term "theology" has changed since ancient Greece (and even conjectured future changes) see F. Whaling, "The Development of the Word 'Theology'," in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981): 289-312.

## DIVISIONS IN THEOLOGY

Systematic theology is but one division within the larger field of theology, which also includes historical theology, **biblical** and exegetical theology, and practical theology. It will be helpful to look at each of the other divisions of theology and note how systematic theology relates to them.

**Historical Theology.** Historical theology is the study of the way in which the Church has sought down through history to clarify its **affirmations** about the revealed truths of Scripture. The Bible was written over a period of time as the Holy Spirit inspired various persons to write. Similarly, but without the inspiration which the Bible possesses, the Church, over time, has stated and restated what it believed. That historical development of doctrinal affirmations is the subject of historical theology. The study begins with the historical setting of the biblical books and continues through the history of the Church to the present.

Especially important to historical **theology** are the attempts to clarify and defend the teachings of the Bible. The Church was required by the pagan world in which it was born to explain what it believed in terms that could be understood. As attacks against those beliefs were mounted by antagonists, the Church was drawn into defending itself against accusations that ranged from **the charge** that believers were cannibals (because of the Lord's Supper) to the charge that they were revolutionaries (because they claimed but one Lord, and that was not Caesar). In these arenas the Church refined its statements of belief.

**Biblical and Exegetical Theology.** Biblical and exegetical theology are twin disciplines. They place great emphasis on employing the correct interpretive tools and techniques so as to hear accurately the message of the sacred texts. The overriding concern is to hear the same message of the Bible that the original hearers and readers heard. This drives this division of theology to studies in the biblical languages, the customs and culture of Bible times (especially what archaeology has discovered), etc.

Biblical theology does not try to organize the total teaching of the Bible under **specific** categories; rather, the goal is to isolate the teachings in given, and limited, biblical contexts, usually book by book, writer by writer, or in historical groupings. Exegetical theology, with the input of biblical theology "will seek to identify the single truth-intention of individual phrases, clauses, and sentences as they make up the thought

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of paragraphs, sections, and ultimately entire books.”<sup>19</sup> **Exegesis**<sup>20</sup> (or exegetical theology) must be done in the light of the total context of the book as well as the immediate context of the passage.

Old Testament theology is the initial stage. It attempts to let the Old Testament stand on its own, speaking its own message for its own time to its own **people**.<sup>21</sup> Yet, in a progressive unfolding of God’s plan, it has a forward look that points to the future.

New Testament theology must also be studied in its own right, looking for the message the writer had for the audience he was writing to, using good exegesis to determine his intended meaning.

Then it is important to see the unity of both Testaments, while at the same time recognizing the diversity of their **different** historical and cultural contexts. The divine Author, the Holy Spirit, inspired all the writers of the Bible and provided direction that brought unity to their writings. He caused the New Testament writers to use the Old Testament and project Jesus as its fulfillment, especially of God’s plan of salvation. This unity of the Bible is important because it makes possible the application of biblical theology for different situations and in different cultures, as systematic theology attempts to do (taking biblical theology as its source).

**Practical Theology.** Practical theology is the division of theology that puts the truths of theological investigation into practice in the life of the community. Included in this division are preaching, evangelism, missions, pastoral care and counseling, pastoral administration, church education, and Christian ethics. The message of theology here takes on flesh and blood, so to speak, and ministers among the believers.

Systematic theology plays a vital role within theology in general. It makes use of the data discovered by historical,

“Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 47, 138.

<sup>20</sup>For now, by “exegesis” we mean that the interpreter engages in a process that allows, or brings out, what the Spirit intended to say through the biblical author. Exegesis in no way diminishes the role of the Spirit, either in inspiration or in interpretation.

“Revelation given after the passage being studied should not be read into it (e.g., the New Testament is not to be read back into the Old Testament), though such revelation, as Kaiser says, “may (and should, in fact) be brought into our *conclusion* or *summaries* after we have firmly established on exegetical grounds precisely what the passage means.” Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 140.

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biblical, and exegetical theology, organizing the results of those divisions into an easily transmitted form. As such, it is indebted to them for the truths it presents. Practical theology, then, makes use of the truths organized by systematic theology in its ministry to the body of Christ.

#### PROTESTANT THEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

Within Protestantism are several theological systems. The examination of every such theological system would take more space than is available for this text. So we will survey two that have been prominent since the Reformation: Calvinism and Arminianism. Many other theological systems can be found in the present age. Three of them will be considered briefly: liberation theology, evangelicalism, and **Pentecostalism**. This selective approach is necessary both because of the space limitations and the relationship of these systems to the present text.

**Calvinism.** Calvinism owes its name and its beginning to the French theologian and reformer John Calvin (1509–64).<sup>22</sup> The central tenet of Calvinism is that God is sovereign of all of His creation.

One of the easier ways to gain a quick understanding of Calvinism is by the use of the acronym TULIP. Before explaining that acronym it must be admitted that any generalization **about** a theological system is subject to omissions and oversimplification. With that in mind, the acronym TULIP can identify five central beliefs in Calvinism: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the **saints**.<sup>23</sup> (T) The human race is so fallen as a result of sin that persons can do nothing either to improve or approve themselves before God. (U) The sovereign God in past eternity **elected** (chose) some of the race to be saved, without the prior condition of knowing who would accept His offer, out of grace and compassion for fallen humanity. (L) He sent His Son to provide atonement **only** for those whom He had elected. (I) Those elected cannot resist His gracious offer; they will be saved. (P) Once they have

<sup>22</sup>Calvinism has, of course, undergone some modification in the teachings of some of Calvin’s successors.

<sup>23</sup>All five points of the TULIP are based on a specific view of God’s sovereignty: It neglects the fact that God is sovereign over himself and is thereby able to limit himself in areas of His choice so that we might have true free will, able to choose to become His children, rather than bound to be His puppets.

been saved they will persevere to the end and receive the ultimate of salvation, eternal life.

**Arminianism.** The Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) disagreed with the tenets of Calvinism, arguing that (1) they tended to make God the author of sin by His choice in past eternity of who would and who would not be saved and (2) they denied the free will of persons because they said no one can resist the grace of God.

The teachings of Arminius and his followers were codified in the five theses of the Articles of Remonstrance (1610): (1) Predestination is conditional on a person's response, being grounded in God's foreknowledge; (2) Christ died for each and every person but only believers are saved; (3) a person is unable to believe and needs the grace of God; but (4) this grace is resistible; (5) whether all the regenerate will persevere requires further investigation.<sup>24</sup>

The differences between Calvinism and Arminianism should be apparent. For Arminians, God knows beforehand those who will respond to His offer of grace, and it is those whom He predestines to share in His promises. In other words, God predestines that all who freely choose His salvation provided in Christ and continue to live for Him will share His promises. Jesus makes atonement potentially for all people, and effectually for those who respond to God's gracious offer of salvation, an offer that they can resist. If they respond with acceptance to God's grace, it is because of the initiation of grace and not of human will alone. Perseverance is conditional upon the continued living of the Christian faith, and falling away from that faith is possible, though God does not let anyone go easily.

Most Pentecostals tend toward the Arminian system of theology, seeing the necessity for response to the gospel and to the Holy Spirit on the part of the individual.<sup>25</sup>

**Liberation Theology.** Born in Latin America in the late 1960s, liberation theology is a "diffuse movement"<sup>26</sup> of various dissenting groups (e.g., blacks, feminists). Its main concern is the reinterpretation of the Christian faith from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed. Exponents claim

<sup>24</sup>R. W. A. Letham, "Arminianism," in New *Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 45–46.

<sup>25</sup>See chap. 10 for further discussion on Calvinism and Arminianism.

<sup>26</sup>H. M. Conn, "Liberation Theology," in New *Dictionary of Theology*, 387.

that the only gospel that properly addresses the needs of those groups of people is one that proclaims liberation from their poverty and oppression. The message of liberationists is judgment for the rich and the oppressor and liberation for the poor and the oppressed.

One of the central concerns of liberation theology is the concept of praxis: theology must be done, not just learned. That is to say, the commitment to the renovation of society so that the poor and oppressed are delivered from their circumstances is the essence of the theological endeavor. The commitment to such change often takes Scripture out of context and can (and often does) employ means that could be described as Marxist or revolutionary.<sup>27</sup>

**Evangelicalism.** The theological system known as evangelicalism has a widespread influence today. With the formation of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942, new impetus was given to the proclamation of the tenets of this system, and they have been accepted by members of many Christian bodies. The name gives insight into one of the central concerns of the system, the communication of the gospel to the entire world, a communication that calls individuals to personal faith in Jesus Christ. The theological expressions of evangelicalism come from both Calvinist and Arminian camps. They claim that evangelicalism is nothing more than the same orthodox belief system that was first found in the Early Church. The social agenda of evangelicalism calls the faithful to work for justice in society as well as for the salvation of the people's souls.

**Pentecostalism.** For the most part, Pentecostal theology fits well within the bounds of the evangelical system. However, Pentecostals take seriously the working of the Holy Spirit to verify the truths as real and empower their proclamation. This often leads to the charge that Pentecostals are experience-based. The charge is not totally true, for the Pentecostal sees the experience brought by the working of the Holy Spirit to be secondary to the Bible in status of authority. The experience verifies, clarifies, emphasizes, or enforces the truths of

<sup>27</sup>For further study on liberation theology see Rubem Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1969); Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978); Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973); Jose Miguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, trans. John Drury (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); and Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1976).

the Bible, and that function of the Spirit is important and crucial.

## THEOLOGICAL METHOD

Since it is important that systematic theology be based on the Bible, in this section we will deal with theological method, especially as it interacts with exegesis and biblical theology.

## EXEGESIS AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AS THE MATRIX

Several stages of development exist in this theological process in which one moves from the Bible to systematic theology: (1) exegesis and interpretation of individual texts, (2) synthesis of these interpretations, according to some system of biblical **theology**,<sup>28</sup> and (3) the presentation of these teachings in the systematician's own language and for his own needs and the needs of his **people**.<sup>29</sup>

In Western theology, some organizing principle is used to produce a coherent set of beliefs. Then the Bible's theology, without changing its meaning, is placed in the thought forms of the theologian's audience to communicate God's message

<sup>28</sup>For centuries, systematic theology in the West has been arranged according to a coherent system reflecting rational idealism (cf. theologians' quest for a unifying center). This arrangement has also controlled biblical theology, with few exceptions. This use of a single center, however, has limitations; for example, it does not allow for paradox, so prevalent in the ancient world. What is now becoming more acceptable to most theologians is to see some sort of system arranged around a number of centers. See Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991), 282-85; Gerhard Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), especially 204-20; D. A. Carson, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 65-95; Robert B. Sloan, "Unity in Diversity: A Clue to the Emergence of the New Testament as Sacred Literature," in *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 437-68.

<sup>29</sup>What we refer to here is systematic theology. This may even mean using a different system of arrangement. Many see an additional stage of development involving church history. See, for example, Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 268-69. William Menzies argues against this stage when reviewing Gordon Fee's *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991). See his review in *Paraclete* 27 (Winter 1993): 29-32.

in understandable language and help the listeners to solve their problems.

To maintain biblical authority in the process of systematic theology, it is imperative that the person doing the theology avoid deduction. By this we mean that theologians should not begin with a general theological statement and impose it on the biblical text to make the Bible mean what they want it to mean at the expense of the text's real intention. Rather, careful exegetical study of the biblical text should lead (inductively) to a theological statement.

## THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF EXEGESIS

The goal of exegesis is to let the Scripture say what the Spirit intended it to mean in its original context. The interpreter, then, for each text must analyze the social and historical context, the genre and other literary factors, and insights from the original language. Let us make some observations about each of these in order.

In regard to the social and historical context, a biblical writer presupposed his audience had a certain common culture and historical frame; much of this was assumed rather than stated. We must be careful not to assume naively that the biblical writer's cultural and historical frame is the same as ours. It is not. Between the interpreter and any biblical text vast cultural and historical differences exist.

Howard C. Kee makes the point that meaning can be determined only by looking at the social context of words. For example, by being sensitive to social and cultural factors, we can see that Matthew uses the term "righteousness" as "a quality of behavior ... demanded by God and to be fulfilled by his faithful servants," while Paul in a different framework uses it as an action where God sets things **right**.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, we need to be aware of the import of genre, the particular kind of document or literary form one is examining. Being aware of the nature of a document is one of the first principles of **interpretation**.<sup>31</sup> Unless we know how it is put together and for what reason, we will miss the meaning of the text.

<sup>30</sup>Howard C. Kee, *Knowing the Truth: A Sociological Approach to New Testament Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989). See especially, 50-64. Bruce Malina makes the same point in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. Jerome H. Neyreys (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 3-23. These approaches are sociolinguistic.

<sup>31</sup>The use of genre is well-established in exegetical method.

Many different genres exist in Scripture: historical narrative (e.g., Genesis, Ruth, Chronicles, and Acts<sup>32</sup>), poetry (e.g., Psalms, Job, Proverbs), gospel (episodic narrative and sermon addressed to particular audiences), epistle (letter), apocalypse (Revelation), and prophecy. By studying what the writer is using and why he is using that particular genre, one can more readily interpret the document.

Genre is of interest to the Pentecostal because of the theology of initial evidence, an interpretation that depends in part on the genre of Acts. Pentecostals and evangelicals have debated the genre, the latter often treating Acts as mere history. Pentecostals, on the other hand, argue that Acts is theological in nature,<sup>33</sup> much the same as the Gospel of Luke, since Luke wrote both. Therefore, we can use Acts as a source of doctrine.<sup>34</sup>

Another concern is the meaning of biblical words. Here we must avoid the root fallacy. Simply stated, the root fallacy occurs when a word's etymology (i.e., its root meaning) is applied to that word every time it appears. Or, as sometimes is done, the etymology is applied only to select appearances of the word to support the interpreter's viewpoint. However, usage, not derivation, determines meaning. (For example, "prevent" is from the Latin *praevenire*, "to come before." But it has an entirely different meaning in English today.) Consequently, context is extremely important. A word may have a variety of meanings, but in a particular context only one of them will apply.

#### BIBLICAL CRITICISM, INTERPRETATION, AND THEOLOGY

The whole area of criticism<sup>35</sup> has developed since the Reformation. The two major divisions of biblical criticism, formerly called higher and lower, are now usually called literary-historical and textual criticism, respectively. Conservatives

<sup>32</sup>In general, the hermeneutic applied to Acts must be the same as that applied to Luke, for both are narrative. Some differences do exist, though: The Gospel is episodic narrative; Acts is sustained narrative.

<sup>33</sup>That is, its purpose is to teach theological truth, not simply to satisfy historical curiosity. See I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 21-52; and Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), 5-9.

<sup>34</sup>See chap. 13, pp. 432-37.

<sup>35</sup>By "criticism" we mean the art of investigating and analyzing. This has often been seen as negative, but should be understood as positive.

as well as liberals work in both areas, since both types of criticism are necessary in exegesis. Furthermore, both of these offer, and have offered, beneficial service to the Church at large. Historical criticism helps us to know more precisely the historical information of a biblical passage or book, enabling us to interpret it with more insight. Primary sources of historical information include the Bible itself, other ancient writings, and archaeological discoveries. Secondary sources include books written by interpreters, both ancient and modern.

Textual criticism is the science that examines ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek handwritten copies (manuscripts) of the Bible and seeks to recover what the original inspired writers actually wrote.<sup>36</sup> Thousands of ancient manuscripts of the Bible exist, and all of them have differences here and there in wording, in word order, and in the omission or addition of words.<sup>37</sup> Many of these are mistakes made by copyists. Others may have been deliberate changes or updating of the language. Textual criticism uses objective and scientific methods to sift through the various readings to discover the most probable one.<sup>38</sup>

On the one hand, some have applied to the biblical text fanciful historical reconstructions according to some modern theory of history (usually denying the supernatural in the process). On the other hand, we recognize that the proper frame of reference considers all Scripture to be inspired by God and to partake of a special character that deserves respect. When one engages in biblical criticism, then, ideally one does not attack the Bible (though many do). Rather, one attacks his or her understanding of the Bible so as to bring that interpretation into line with the original meaning of Scripture.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup>The original manuscripts themselves (autographs) were probably worn out by being copied again and again over many years.

These differences are called textual variants. See chap. 3, pp. 106-07.

<sup>37</sup>Specialists use the word "probable" because we do not have the autographs. However, careful investigation shows we can be sure we have what the original writers wrote in all but about one-tenth of one percent of the variant readings, and most of the ones where we cannot be sure are minor variations, such as in spelling. None of these variants affect any of the great teachings of the Bible.

<sup>39</sup>Some of the current methods of literary-historical criticism are source criticism (which usually assumes Matthew and Luke used Mark and an unknown source [Q, for Ger. *quelle*, meaning "source"] for their material), form criticism (which usually denies the supernatural and breaks the Bible

For example, in its simplest form, Pentecostal interpreters have for some time used what might be termed “narrative criticism.” Exponents of Spirit baptism have argued for a theology of initial evidence in Acts, believing that speaking in tongues is normative because the narrative frequently notes that this phenomenon occurs when the Spirit initially fills someone. The repetition in the narrative provides archetypal behavior and thereby expresses this theology. The nature of the narrative, then, provides the theology of initial evidence (i.e., an “oughtness”<sup>40</sup> is present in the narrative). That is, what Acts records was intended by Luke to show us that speaking in other tongues is not only the initial physical evidence, but also the convincing evidence that lets us know when a person has actually been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The theological conservative believes the narrative to be rooted in actual history (i.e., history is the medium of revelation\*). When the (biblical) writer wrote down the narrative, the Holy Spirit guided the selection of material that served His purpose and omitted that which did not.

Let us take Acts 2 and briefly demonstrate what we are saying. Acts 2 is one account within the larger narrative of

up into fragments supposedly pieced together by a collector), and *redaction criticism* (which considers the biblical writers as authors and theologians, but often ignores the great body of Jesus’ teaching and the Holy Spirit’s inspiration). Many Bible believers make some careful use of the first and third of these methods. D. W. Kerr, not knowing what it would later be called, actually utilized redaction criticism in “The Bible Evidence of the Baptism with the Holy Ghost,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, 11 August 1923, in which he argued for the distinctiveness of Spirit baptism. For example, in referring to John 20:30 and 21:15 he wrote: “John made a *selection* of just such materials as served his purpose, and that is, to confirm believers in the faith concerning Jesus Christ the Son of God” (p. 2).

Other methods include *canon criticism* (which considers the present order of the books in the Bible to be important), *narrative criticism* (which pays attention to characters, plot, and climax), *social science criticism* (which uses sociological theories to set up a theoretical model to explain cultures, often from a secular, antsupernatural point of view), and *reader response criticism* (which ignores the world behind the Bible text and shifts the authority to the subjective response of the reader. (See Malina, *World of Luke-Acts*, 3-23, for reaction against reader response criticism).

<sup>40</sup>One of the significant features of theology is its “oughtness.” By this I mean that there is some sort of compulsion about it, and in some points more so than others.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Walter C. Kaiser’s view, referred to, commented upon, and presented in Ben C. Ollenburger, Elmer A. Martens, and Gerhard F. Hasel, eds., *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology*, (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 233. In fact, in much of the approaches of biblical theology, history is significant, though in different ways.

Acts. We determine that it is a specific narrative because we **are** able to distinguish its boundaries, within which we are able to find the characters, plot, and climax. The chapter has three parts: the Spirit’s coming, the people’s response, and Peter’s **sermon**.<sup>42</sup>

The heart of the narrative (Peter’s message) explains the theological function of tongues and the coming of the Spirit. Tongues are the sign that the promised age of salvation and the Spirit have arrived; tongues are the sign that the Spirit has empowered the Church for inspired witness of Jesus. Furthermore, the primary purpose of tongues is to witness that the Hebrew Scriptures prophesied about this age of the Spirit, that all of God’s people would have the Spirit and speak in tongues, and that these tongues would evidence that God had raised Jesus from the dead and had exalted Him to heaven, where He is now pouring out the Spirit. **Also**, people who speak in tongues witness about the day of salvation and the gospel of Jesus (cf. 1:8), the coming of the kingdom of God, which now confronts the power of darkness in signs and wonders. Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, selected the main elements from the Day of Pentecost and placed them in this brief narrative so as to convince the people that they should seek the baptism in the Spirit.

The emphasis of the coming of the Spirit in power is a major theme in Luke and Acts. This suggests that Luke’s **audience** lacked the Spirit baptism and that he considered the norm for the Early Church to be Spirit-baptized with the evidence of speaking in tongues. His audience, then, should receive this baptism with the sign of speaking in tongues. This empowerment would thrust them out into their world as a powerful witnessing community.

Narration was common in antiquity and **still** is in many places, **especially** the Third World. It is also making a comeback in the West. Narrative communicates indirectly: the narrator makes his point(s) through such elements as dialogue and behavior. Behavior in this way becomes archetypal, that is, it is what the readers are expected to evaluate and emulate (**e.g., in** Acts 2 receiving the Spirit with speaking in tongues would be normative).

Narrative, and indirection, is contrasted to types of literature that communicate directly. In direct communication the author makes his point in the first person, and it occurs in

<sup>42</sup>Actually, not a sermon in the ordinary sense of the word, but a manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s gift of prophecy.

propositional form. An example of direction in Scripture is the letter form. The Bible contains theology in both narrative and propositional form.

#### PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE INTERPRETER AND THEOLOGIAN

Finally, it is important that we discuss what we as interpreters bring to the text from our world (i.e., presuppositions). First, we should be committed to verbal, plenary inspiration.<sup>43</sup> The methods outlined above should **affirm** this view. We must pay attention to the whole counsel of God and avoid overworking any one theme or text. Otherwise, a canon within a canon emerges, another serious error. That is, in a practical way we draw a circle inside a larger circle (the entire Bible) and say in practice that this is more inspired than the rest. Or if we derive theology only from a select part of Scripture, the same thing happens.

It is important, therefore, that the Pentecostal have both a biblical and a Pentecostal base and frame of reference. First, the Pentecostal must believe in the supernatural world, especially in God who works in mighty ways and reveals himself in history. Miracles in the biblical sense are a common occurrence. In the Bible, “miracle” refers to any manifestation of God’s power, not necessarily to a rare or unusual event.\*\* Furthermore, other powers in that supernatural world, angelic (good) and demonic (evil), enter and operate in our world. The Pentecostal is not a materialist (believing that nothing exists except matter and its laws), nor a rationalist, but recognizes the reality of this supernatural realm.

Second, the Pentecostal’s frame of reference must focus on

<sup>43</sup>See chap. 3, pp. 100–01. All evangelicals and Pentecostals should consider carefully Jeremy Begbie, “Who is this God?—Biblical Inspiration Revisited,” in *Tyndale Bulletin* 43 (November 1992): 259–82. He points out significant weaknesses about the view of the Trinity and salvation manifested in B. B. Warfield’s description of inspiration. Warfield’s lack of biblical attention to the theology of the Spirit causes him to fall into these weaknesses. According to Begbie, James Barr falls into similar errors.

<sup>44</sup>This definition is against that of Norman L. Geisler in *Miracles and the Modern Mind A Defense of Biblical Miracles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 14, who, after discussing definitions, concludes, “Natural law describes naturally caused regularities; a miracle is a supernaturally caused singularity.” This approach to miracles is somewhat typical of the approach of the rational evangelical, who says miracles ceased after the New Testament was completed.

God’s disclosure of **himself**.<sup>45</sup> The Pentecostal believes that Scripture is the authoritative mode of revelation, which affirms, confirms, guides, and witnesses to God’s activity in the world, when properly interpreted. But a rational knowing or simple memorizing of Scripture does not take the place of a personal experience of regeneration and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, with all the activities of witness and edification that the Spirit opens up to us.

Pentecostals believe it is counterproductive to downplay these experiences. John’s Gospel clearly, purposefully, and powerfully says that rebirth by the Spirit is the way to open up knowledge of God. Without this experience, one cannot know God. Another way to perceive this is to apply the term “cognitive” to that which comes from studying Scripture (or theology in the Western manner) and the term “affective” to knowledge that comes from personal experience. We should not play one against the other; both are essential. But personal experience is important. How great regeneration and the baptism in the Spirit are! After both, we know God more fully and, certainly, **personally**.

Furthermore, the Pentecostal believes God speaks to His church through the gifts of the Holy Spirit to correct, edify, or comfort. Although these are subordinate to and discerned in light of Scripture, they should be encouraged.

With this in mind, theology (and education) need not deaden spiritual fervor. Actually, it is not theology or education but the theological and educational frame of reference that dampens the work of the Holy Spirit. It is important, then, to interpret the Bible on its own terms and with the appropriate frame of reference. That will give us an experience-certified theology, a theology that through faith and obedience becomes a Bible-based “**experience-reality**,”<sup>46</sup> effective in our daily lives, rather than a theology that is merely something to argue about.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is religion and how does Christianity **differ** from other religions?

<sup>45</sup>What we are suggesting here pertains to epistemology—ways of knowing and perceiving reality. Unfortunately, both conservative and liberal Westerners hold to a primarily rational epistemology. This is inadequate for the Pentecostal. The world of the Bible is not that of the rationalist, for it recognizes the supernatural, and God-given supernatural experiences.

<sup>46</sup>Stronstad, *Charismatic Theology*, 81.

2. **How** do the various categories of authority differ in their methods and results?

3. Why is it important to understand the life and culture of Bible times?

4. What do historical and biblical theology contribute to systematic theology?

5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Calvinism and Arminianism?

6. What is the goal of exegesis and what is involved in reaching that goal?

7. How have **Pentecostals** used narrative criticism and with what effect?

8. What is involved in having both a biblical and a Pentecostal base for our theology?

## ***CHAPTER THREE***

# ***God's Inspired Word***

***John R. Higgins***

Theology, in its attempt to know God and to make Him known, presupposes that knowledge about God has been revealed. This revelation is foundational to all theological **affirmations** and pronouncements. What has not been revealed cannot be known, studied, or explained.

Simply put, revelation is the act of making known something that was previously unknown. What was hidden is now disclosed. A mother reveals what is baking in the oven; the auto mechanic reveals what is causing the engine to stall; the little boy reveals what creature is jumping in his pocket. **Each** of the mysteries is ended.

Although revelation occurs in every area of life, the term is especially associated with matters of religion. "Wherever there is religion, there is the claim to revelation."<sup>1</sup> Questions of faith center on God's becoming known to human beings. Christianity is a revealed religion based on divine **self-disclosure**.

The Bible uses a number of Greek and Hebrew terms to express the concept of **revelation**.<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew verb *gālāh* means to reveal by uncovering or by stripping something away (Isa. 47:3). Frequently it is used of God's communication of himself to people. "Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the **proph-**

<sup>1</sup>Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), 20.

<sup>2</sup>Dewey M. Beegle, "The Biblical Concept of Revelation," in *The Authoritative Word*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 95. Beegle suggests over thirty terms associated with the concept of revelation used in the Bible.

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ets" (Amos 3:7). The Greek word *apokalupsis* (revelation) is associated with the making known of the Christian gospel. Paul said he did not receive the gospel from man's instruction, but he "received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1: 12). J. Oliver Buswell claims that *apokalupsis* may be used of persons or objects, but is usually used of some revealed truth.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, it is God who manifests or shows (Gk. *phaneroō*) himself (1 Tim. 3: 16).

In other words, revelation involves not only information about God, but also the presentation of God himself. This, however, does not mean that one must reject propositional revelation\* in favor of existential revelation.<sup>5</sup> Rather, "revelation *about* God is crucial to the knowledge *of* God."<sup>6</sup> Through His words and acts God makes known His person, His ways, His values, His purposes, and His plan of salvation. The ultimate goal of divine revelation is that people will come to know God in a real and personal way.

Although divine revelation is often limited to God's self-disclosure, in original acts or words, it may also be understood as a larger chain of revelatory events. This broader understanding of divine revelation would include reflection and inscripturation (i.e., putting the revelation into written form) by inspired writers, the process of canonization of the inspired writings, and the illumination by the Holy Spirit of what God has revealed.

## THE REVELATION OF GOD TO HUMANKIND

Inherent in the concept of a God who reveals himself is the reality of a God who is fully conscious of His own being. Cornelius Van Til describes God's knowledge of himself as analytical, meaning "knowledge that is not gained by reference to something that exists without the knower."<sup>4</sup> God's knowledge of himself did not come from comparing or contrasting himself with anything outside himself. "God had in himself all knowledge from all eternity. ... Hence, all knowl-

<sup>3</sup>James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 183.

\*Statements that declare something about God.

<sup>5</sup>That is, knowledge that comes through one's own personal experience.

<sup>6</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation-The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 24.

<sup>4</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1972), 37.

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edge that any finite creature of God would ever have, whether of things that pertain directly to God or of things that pertain to objects in the created universe itself, would ... have to rest upon the revelation of God."<sup>8</sup>

The absolutely and eternally self-conscious God took the initiative to make himself known to His creation.

God's revelation of himself was a deliberate self-disclosure. No one forced God to unmask himself; no one discovered Him by accident. In a voluntary act God made himself known to those who otherwise could not know Him. Emil Brunner sees this self-revelation as an "incursion from another dimension," bringing knowledge "wholly inaccessible to man's natural faculties for research and discovery."<sup>9</sup>

Finite humanity is reminded that the infinite God cannot be found apart from His own invitation to know Him. J. Gresham Machen calls into question the gods of people's own making:

A divine being that could be discovered by my efforts, apart from His gracious will to reveal Himself ..., **would be either a mere name for a certain aspect of man's own nature, a God that we could find within us, or else ... a mere passive thing that would be subject to investigation like the substances that are analyzed in a laboratory. ... I think we ought to be rather sure that we cannot know God unless God has been pleased to reveal Himself to us.**<sup>10</sup>

In the Book of Job, the answer to Zophar's question, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God?" is a resounding no (Job 11:7). By one's own searching, apart from what God has revealed, nothing could be known about God and His will, not even His existence. Because the infinite **cannot be** uncovered by the finite, all human **affirmations** about God end up as questions rather than declarations. "The highest achievements of the human mind and spirit **fall** short of arriving at the knowledge of God."<sup>11</sup>

A person never progresses beyond the reality that what God has **freely** revealed sets the boundaries of all knowledge

<sup>8</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1978), 63.

<sup>9</sup>Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, 23, 30.

<sup>10</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1936), 14-15.

<sup>11</sup>J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 31.



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of Him. Divine revelation strips away all pretensions of human pride, autonomy, and self-sufficiency. The God of the universe has made himself known; the needed response to this initiative is, like Kepler's, to think God's thoughts after Him.

God not only initiated the revelation of himself, but also determined what that revelation would be, the form it would take, and the varied conditions and circumstances required for making himself known. His revelation of himself was a controlled self-disclosure. The communication of himself was exclusively determined by God.

God set the times of His revelation. He did not reveal himself all at once, but chose to make himself known gradually over many centuries. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers ... at many times and in various ways" (Heb. 1: 1). Even for God there is "a time to be silent and a time to speak" (Eccles. 3:7). He revealed himself when He was ready, when He wanted to declare His name and His ways (Exod. 3:14-15).

The manner in which God revealed himself-helping human beings to understand His nature, His ways, and His relationship to them-was also determined by Him. At times it was external, such as a voice, an event, a cloud, or an angel. On other occasions the revelation was internal, a dream or vision (Exod. 13:21-22; Num. 12:6; Dan. 9:21-22; Acts 9:3-4). But in either case, God did the revealing; He selected the manner in which His truth would be made known.

Likewise God determined the place and circumstance of His revelation. He made himself known in Eden's garden, in Midian's desert, and on Sinai's mountain (Gen. 2: 15-17; Exod. 3:4-12; 19:9-19). In palaces, in pastures, and in prisons He made His person and ways known (Neh. 1: 11; Luke 2:8-14; Acts 12:6-11). Human searching for God results only in finding God on His terms (Jer. 29: 13). God determines even the recipients of His revelation, be they shepherd or king, fisherman or priest (See Dan. 5:5-24; Matt. 4:18-20; 26:63-64).

The content of divine revelation is what God wanted communicated-nothing more, nothing less. All talk about God is speculation apart from what He himself has revealed. Karl Barth describes God as the one "to whom there is no path nor bridge, concerning whom we could not say ... a single word if He did not of His own initiative meet us."<sup>12</sup> From God's initial self-disclosure and throughout the eternal ages,

<sup>12</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 321.

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Carl F. H. Henry says, "the God of the Bible is wholly determinative in respect to revelation."<sup>13</sup>

Revelation, initiated and determined by God, is therefore personal communication. It originates in a personal God and is received by a personal creation. God reveals himself, not as some mere cosmic force or inanimate object, but as a personal being who speaks, loves, and cares for His creation. He scorns "other gods," who are only the work of a craftsman's hands (Isa. 40:12-28; 46:5-10), and reveals himself in terms of personal relationships, identifying himself by such terms as Father, Shepherd, Friend, Leader, and King. It is in these kinds of personal relationships that human beings are privileged to know Him.

Divine revelation is an expression of grace. God did not have a need that compelled Him to reveal himself. Perfect fellowship among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit required no external supplement. Rather, God made himself known to human beings for their benefit. Humankind's greatest privilege is to be able to know God and glorify and enjoy Him forever.<sup>14</sup> Such privileged communication from the Creator reflects God's love and goodness. Only because of God's gracious self-giving is a person able to come to know God truly. Brunner finds it wonderfully amazing that "God Himself gives Himself to me myself, and after that I can give myself to Him, in that I accept His self-giving."<sup>15</sup>

Carl Henry draws attention to the "unto you, unto us" character of divine revelation as God brings the priceless good news that He calls the human race to fellowship with Him.

God's purpose in revelation is that we may know him personally as he is, may avail ourselves of his gracious forgiveness and offer of new life, may escape the catastrophic judgment for our sins, and venture personal fellowship with him. "I will ... be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12, KJV), he declares."

In mercy God continues to reveal himself to fallen human-

<sup>13</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 2 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1976), 19.

<sup>14</sup>See "The Larger Catechism" in *The Westminster Standards* (Philadelphia: Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1925), Question and Answer 1.

<sup>15</sup>Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, 42.

<sup>16</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1, 31.

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ity. To walk with Adam and Eve in the garden paradise is one thing, but to call wayward, rebellious sinners to forgiveness and reconciliation is another (Gen. 3:8; Heb. 3: 15). One could understand had God's gracious revelation ended with Eden's flaming sword, Israel's golden calf, or Calvary's rugged cross. However, God's revelation is redemptive in character. "The invisible, hidden and transcendent God, whom no man has seen nor can see, has planted His Word in the human situation that sinners might be brought nigh unto God."<sup>17</sup>

An invitation to personal knowledge of himself is God's highest gift to the human race. Its attainment is the cry of the human heart. "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in **Thee**."<sup>18</sup> To know God at all is to want to know Him more. "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:8).

Clearly God's revelation of himself is for humankind's benefit. This does not mean, however, that divine revelation itself guarantees a positive response to God by the recipient of that revelation. "Precisely because divine revelation is for man's benefit we dare not obscure its informational content nor mistake God's disclosure as automatically saving. ... Simply hearing God's revealed good news ... does not redeem us **automatically**."<sup>19</sup>

God's revelation is a proclamation of life, but when rejected, a proclamation of death (Deut. 30:15; 2 Cor. 2:16).

God has graciously revealed himself and His ways to His creation. His self-disclosure spans the centuries, varies in form, and offers privileged communion with the Creator. This abundant revelation, however, has not exhausted the mystery of the eternal God. Some things about himself and His purpose He has chosen not to make known (Deut. 29:29; Job 36:26; Ps. 139:6; Rom. 11:33). This conscious withholding of information is a reminder that **God** transcends His own revelation. What God has withheld is beyond the need and possibility of persons to find out.

Revelation has both its basis and its limits in the will of God. ... Human beings universally have no native resourcefulness for delineating God's nature and **will**. Not even gifted persons of special

<sup>17</sup>Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 29.

<sup>18</sup>*The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Edward B. Pusey (New York: P. F. Collier and Son Corporation, 1937), 5.

<sup>19</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1, 38.

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capacity or notable religious **endowment** can by their own abilities divine **the secrets** of the Infinite. ... **whereby they** on their own power and initiative may clarify the **mysteries** of eternity.<sup>20</sup>

Libraries are full of explanations of God's self-revelation, but such explanations must not be understood as adding to that revelation. As John the Baptist, one is called "to testify concerning that light," not to create new light (John 1:7).

At all points God is fully in control of His own revelation. He is not imprisoned by the majesty of His person so that He cannot reveal himself, but neither is He incapable of selective revelation. Just as He determines the content and circumstances of His revelation, He likewise determines the extent of that revelation. God's conscious limiting of His revelation is reflective of the nature of His person. "While God is revealed in his creation, he nonetheless ontologically [in relation to His being or existence] transcends the universe as its Creator, and transcends man epistemologically [with respect to the nature and limits of human knowledge] as **well**."<sup>21</sup> The God of the Bible is not pantheistic but reveals himself as Creator to His creation—a separate and voluntary revelation of which He is totally in control.

Although human beings will never fully exhaust the knowledge of God, God's revelation is not incomplete with respect to humanity's needs. While not exhaustive, what God has made known is **sufficient** for salvation, for acceptability before God, and for instruction in righteousness. Through His revelation one can come to know God and to grow in that knowledge (Ps. 46:10; John 17:3; 2 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 5:19–20).

The inexhaustible God will continue to transcend His revelation, even though our knowledge of Him will be greater, or fuller, in heaven (1 Cor. 13: 12). One of the joys of heaven **will** be the unfolding throughout all eternity of greater insights into God's person and His gracious dealings with the redeemed (Eph. 2:7). That we now know only "in part," however, does not **alter** the validity, importance, and dependability of His present divine revelation.

When it comes to divine revelation, the God of the Bible stands in stark contrast with the gods of polytheistic paganism.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

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He is no local deity competing for a voice in the affairs of a region with divided loyalties. He is not the dumb idol carved from wood or stone. Neither is He the projected voice of political leaders who cloak their ideas in religious mythology. Rather, He is the one true God who is Lord over the whole universe. The revelation of His will is law for all peoples. He is the Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25; Ps. 24:1; Rom. 2:12-16).

Walther Eichrodt notes the distinct linguistic possibility that the Hebrew *Sh'ma* may be read, 'Yahweh our God is one single God' (Deut. 6:4), indicating Yahweh is not a God who can be split into various divinities or powers like the Canaanite gods.<sup>22</sup> When He speaks, there is but one voice; there is no room for confusing or conflicting messages. Although God may choose to reveal himself through various means and to speak through many people, the message remains His and a continuity is evident. In divine revelation there are no dual or rival revelations, but a comprehensive unity flowing from the one and only God.

Consequently, there is an exclusiveness to true divine revelation. Henry suggests two prominent dangers that threaten this rightful exclusiveness. The first is the danger of seeing the human experience of the supernatural in non-Christian world religions as valid divine revelation. These religions do not speak with the voice of God but rather of Satan and his demons (see 1 Cor. 10:20). Some of them even deny the indispensable corollary of genuine divine revelation, the personal existence of God. The second is the tendency to acknowledge additional sources of independent revelation (such as human reason and experience) alongside God's own disclosure. While human reason enables one to know the truth of God, reason is not a new originating source of divine truth.<sup>23</sup> Similarly one may experience the truth of God, but one's experience does not create that truth. One's theology must not be built on subjective experience but on the objective Word of God. Our experience must be judged by the Word, and we must be like the Bereans who "received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17: 11).

<sup>22</sup>Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 226.

<sup>23</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 2, 72-73.

## CATEGORIES OF DIVINE REVELATION

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The two primary categories of divine revelation are general revelation and special revelation. General revelation involves God's self-disclosure through some mediate, natural mode. Special revelation is divine self-disclosure through an immediate, supernatural mode. Natural theology<sup>24</sup> and revealed theology are the theological understandings arrived at through human reason and reflection as one views general revelation and special revelation respectively. General revelation is usually understood as God's making himself known through history, natural environment, and human nature.

## GENERAL REVELATION

**Human History.** God has revealed himself through the providential ordering of human history. As the divine Governor of His universe, He is at work in the oversight and direction of His creation. He guides the affairs of humanity as He moves toward the fulfillment of His purposes. In behalf of His people He acts forcefully and decisively. Israel delighted in rehearsing the mighty "acts of God" throughout their history (Ps. 136). He is the God who sets up kings and brings down kings (Dan. 2:2 1). The creeds of the Church recite God's redemptive acts in history. For example, the Apostles' Creed highlights the acts of creation; Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and second coming; and the judgment. The student of history may trace God's hand in the interactions of nations. As the God who is just and powerful, His dealings with humanity have continuity. "History has a theological character: all of it bears the imprint of God's activity."<sup>25</sup> All history unfolds under God's governing purpose as He controls, guides, and personally acts within it.

**Nature.** God also reveals himself through nature and through the universe. Creation, with its infinite variety, beauty, and order, reflects a God who is infinitely wise and powerful. The moon and countless stars in the heavens are the work of the fingers of the Lord; His name is majestic in all the earth, which He has created (Ps. 8).

<sup>24</sup>Natural theology develops its ideas using human reason apart from and often in a way critical of, or even rejecting, divine revelation. It often makes the individual's own reason the final authority.

<sup>25</sup>Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, 34.

Psalm 19 provides important information about general revelation in nature.

The heavens declare the **glory** of God; the skies proclaim **the work** of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their **voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world** (Ps. 19: 1-4).

This passage has been wrapped in controversy largely because of the more literal reading of verse three. "They have no speech, there are no words; no sound is heard from them" (v. 3, NIV, alternate translation). Four different interpretations of this passage suggest four views on general revelation in nature.

1. The universe is mute and there is no objective general revelation through nature.
2. There is an objective general revelation in nature, but it is not subjectively perceived because it falls on deaf ears and blind eyes adversely affected by sin.
3. There is no objective general revelation in nature. Rather, a subjective general revelation is read into nature by believers only. The one who already knows God through special revelation reads Him into the creation.
4. There is an objective general revelation, but it is not presented in a formal written or spoken language, nor is it propositional in form. Instead, it is embodied in the language of nature, which transcends all human language, has gone out to the ends of the earth, and is available to all humankind.

The fourth interpretation seems best to fit the context of Psalm 19 and the teaching of Scripture elsewhere on general revelation and nature. "The wordless message of God's glory extends to all the earth. The reflection of God in the vast array of heavenly bodies pulsating with light is viewed by a worldwide **audience**."<sup>26</sup> Other psalms, such as Psalms 29, 33, 93, and 104, celebrate God's majesty revealed in the realm of nature.

To the people of Lystra Paul speaks of a continuing witness the Creator God has left about His relationship to His world. "We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn ... to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. ... He has shown kindness by giving you

<sup>26</sup>Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 36.

rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:15,17).

In Paul's speech to the Athenians at the Areopagus (Acts 17), he appeals to what has already been revealed to them through general **revelation**—that God is Creator and is sovereign over His creation. He is self-sufficient, the source of life and all else needed by humankind, and is near and active in human affairs. Significantly Paul gives the reason for this self-disclosure of God in nature. "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him" (Acts 17:27). This is the positive goal of general revelation.

Romans 1:18-21 has been called the locus classicus for God's self-disclosure in nature.<sup>27</sup> General revelation through nature is universally given and universally received. It brings truth about God to all human beings, including the sinner. Through nature the invisible qualities of God—"his eternal power and divine nature"—are made visible. This truth about God, mediated through nature, is "clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Rom. 1:20). Both the perception of the senses and the reflection of the mind are confronted by the phenomena of nature.

The revelation of nature is a revelation from **God** about God. "God's **speech** in nature is not to be confused with the notion of a talking cosmos, as by those who insist that nature speaks, and that we must therefore hear what nature says as if nature were the voice of God. 'Hear God!' is the biblical message, not 'Listen to Nature!'"<sup>28</sup>

God reveals himself in the created order of nature, yet He is not to be identified with the created universe as pantheism insists. The earth and the created universe are not god or gods. If they were, their destruction would be the destruction of God. On the other hand, God is involved in the ongoing processes of the universe He created, and He reveals himself in many ways.

Unfortunately, the rebellious sinner suppresses the truth from nature about God, **incurring** His wrath (Rom. 1:18) and sinking to further ungodliness (Rom. 1:21-32).

**Human Nature.** General revelation also includes God's self-disclosure through one's own human nature. The human race was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). The Fall

<sup>27</sup>Demarest, *General Revelation*, 238.

<sup>28</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1, 98.

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brought a break in the relationship with God. But the image **of God** in human beings was not annihilated by the Fall.

Although man is a sinner through and through, the Bible acknowledges that he is a rational creature with whom God can communicate. . . . Thus God's invitation . . . , " 'Come now, let us reason together,' says the Lord." . . . Moreover, New Testament texts such as Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 assure us that a valid point of contact does exist at the epistemic level [that is, at a level of genuine **knowledge**] between God and man.<sup>29</sup>

**After the Fall** this image was marred and distorted but not utterly destroyed (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). It is in need of renewal.

The moral and spiritual nature of humanity reflects, however inadequately, the moral character of the holy and perfect Creator. A universal, though distorted, awareness of a connection between humanity and God is **affirmed** repeatedly in Scripture and is the testimony of missionaries and anthropologists alike.<sup>30</sup> Romans 2 attests to the validity of God's revelation through human nature even apart from any special revelation from God (Rom. 2: 1-15). Those who do not have the Mosaic law "do by nature things required by the law," because "the requirements of the law are written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:14-15). Even persons estranged from God because of sin are not bereft of a moral consciousness and moral impulses that reflect norms of conduct. God's gracious moral revelation to the human heart preserves sinful humankind from unchecked self-destruction.

The Jews had a written moral code in the **Law**. The Gentiles, on the other hand, had basic moral concepts, which were foundational to the law written on their **hearts**.<sup>31</sup> Paul's designation "requirements **of the law**" emphasizes that the Gentiles do not have a different law, but essentially the same law that confronts the Jews. This "heart law" is **only** less in detail and clarity. The unifying principle between the written Law and the heart law is the source of them both-God!

Many limit this mode of general revelation to a person's conscience. However, it seems preferable to **include** the whole of a person's **moral** nature, which would include the **con-**

<sup>29</sup>Demarest, *General Revelation*, 128.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 229, 243.

<sup>31</sup>The Jews had both the written Law and the heart law.

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science. The conscience witnesses to God's "heart revelation" as a "second **knowing**"<sup>32</sup> alongside what has already been revealed. The "joint witness" of conscience judges whether one is living in obedience to the things of the law written on the heart. In addition, one's thoughts either accuse or excuse an individual on the basis of obedience or disobedience to the heart law (Rom. 2: 15). Consequently, even without being confronted by any written law of God, unregenerate people experience countless mental conflicts every day as they are confronted by God's law within them.

General revelation brings cognitive knowledge of God to all humankind. This knowledge is true and clear and relentless. "The Creator God's testimony to himself . . . continues daily and hourly and moment by moment. Fallen man in his day-to-day life is never completely detached nor isolated from the revelation of **God**."<sup>33</sup> The person who declares there is no God is **most** foolish, for such a declaration denies what is known in the depths of one's being and what is displayed at every turn of **life**.

Bruce Demarest lists nineteen specific areas **of knowledge about God** that Scripture indicates come to humanity through general **revelation**.<sup>34</sup> He concludes that "God's glory (Ps. 19:1), divine nature (Rom. 1:20), and moral demands (Rom. 2:14-15) are to some extent known through general **revelation**!"<sup>35</sup> This revelation of himself is objective, rational, and valid **regardless** of human response to, or availability of, any special revelation **from** God. "General Revelation is not something read into nature by those who know God on other grounds; it is **already** present, by the creation and continuing providence of God?"

<sup>32</sup>Gk. *sunelidēsis*, "co-know&" "conscious, spiritual or **moral** awareness."

<sup>33</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1, 85.

<sup>34</sup>They include the facts that God exists (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:19) and He is **uncreated** (Acts 17:24); that He has standards (Rom. 2:15), requires persons to do good (Rom. 2:15), and judges evil (Rom. 2:15-16); that He is the Creator (Acts 14:15), Sustainer (Acts 14:17; 17:25), and Lord (Acts 17:24), and is **self-sufficient** (Acts 17:24), transcendent (Acts 17:24), **immanent** (Acts 17:26-27), eternal (Ps. 93:2), great (Ps. 8:3-4), majestic (Ps. 29:4), **powerful** (Ps. 29:4; Rom. 1:20), **wise** (Ps. 104:24), **good** (Acts 14:17), **righteous** (Rom. 1:32), **sovereign** (Acts 17:26), and to be worshiped (Acts 14:15; 17:23). Demarest, *General Revelation*, 243.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 170.

To affirm **the validity of objective general revelation is not to deny the consequences of the Fall with regard to such revelation. The Bible clearly states that sin has adversely affected humankind's knowledge of God (Acts 17:23; Rom. 1:18–21; 2 Cor. 4:4). Sin obscures the objective knowledge of God** that comes through general revelation to the point that it limits that knowledge to a cognitive understanding that God exists in majesty and power and executes moral judgment. Sin's effect on the intellect has influenced one's philosophical presuppositions and conclusions and has corrupted the will. "Unbelievers are not God's children, not because they have no knowledge of him, but because they lack spiritual commitment and vocational **obedience**."<sup>37</sup>

Sinful humanity willfully suppresses and rejects the knowledge of God. It manufactures truth substitutes, transgresses God's law that is stamped on the heart, and invents new gods. The knowledge of the true God through general revelation is perverted to become the source of the gods of many world religions.<sup>38</sup> God is made in the image of human beings, rather than human beings acknowledging they were made in the image of God.

Despite the popularity of a **neo-universalism** (see chap. 10) which accepts the truth of all religions, one must recognize these religions as serious distortions of God's true revelation. Persons seeking after God in false religions are not to be applauded as "good enough." The wrath of God is directed at them for their idolatry (Rom. 1:18,23–32).

**Suppression of the truth of God in general revelation does not relieve one of the responsibility to appropriate that truth.**

**The revelation of God [cognitive] invades and penetrates the very mind and conscience of every man, despite the fact that in face of this very revelation, men do not choose to know God [existentially]. . . . Man's situation is not one of natural agnosticism, nor is he called to trust in God in the absence of cognitive knowledge; rather, sinful man violates what he knows to be true and right.**<sup>39</sup>

One can suppress only what one has first experienced. General revelation brings the knowledge of God to all persons

<sup>37</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1, 129.

<sup>38</sup>See, for example, Raimundo Panikkar's scheme of religions in such writings as *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964).

<sup>39</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1, 130, 136.

and "though repressed, [it] is not destroyed. It remains intact, though deeply buried in the subconscious." <sup>40</sup> Since this knowledge of God comes to all, all are left "without excuse" before Him (Rom. 1:20).

While the Bible affirms the reality of objective general revelation, it denies the validity of a natural theology that is based on human reason alone. One cannot reflect on the truth revealed in general revelation and develop a theology that enables one to come to a saving knowledge of God. What Paul says in Romans 1 and 2 concerning general revelation must be understood in light of chapter 3, which emphasizes that all fall short of God's standard and therefore not a single one is righteous (Rom. 3:10,23). General revelation is not designed to allow one to develop additional knowledge of God from the truth it brings. Rather, the truth of general revelation "serves, as does the law [of Scripture], merely to make guilty, not to make **righteous**."<sup>41</sup> However, it does cause the believer to rejoice in the truth (Ps. 19: 1) and may be used by the Spirit to cause one to seek the truth (Acts 17:27).

In response to the troubling question of God's justice in condemning those who have never heard the gospel in the formal sense, Millard J. Erickson states, "No one is completely without opportunity. All have known God; if they have not effectually perceived him, it is because they have suppressed the truth. Thus **all are responsible**."<sup>42</sup> It is important, however, to see general revelation not as the callousness of God but as the mercy of God (Rom. 11:32). "General cosmic-anthropological revelation is continuous with God's special revelation in Jesus Christ not only because both belong to the comprehensive revelation of the living God, but also because general revelation establishes and emphasizes the universal guilt of man whom God offers rescue in the special redemptive manifestation of his **Son**."<sup>43</sup>

As does the written Law, general revelation condemns sinners in order to point them to a Redeemer outside of themselves. Its intent is to lead them to special revelation. In fact, the **insufficiency** of general revelation to save fallen humanity necessitated a special revelation of Jesus Christ as the Truth **who sets** people free from the bondage of sin (John 8:36).

<sup>40</sup>James Montgomery Boice, *The Sovereign God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1978), 34.

<sup>41</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 173.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1, 86.

Because one cannot arrive at God's plan of redemption by a natural theology, a revealed theology is needed through a special revelation from God. For example, moral norms, commands, and prohibitions were established for Adam in Eden by special, not general, revelation. Even though it preceded the Fall, special revelation is primarily understood in terms of "redemptive purpose." Special revelation complements the self-disclosure of God in nature, history, and humanity and builds on the foundation of general revelation. But because general revelation cannot bring salvation, the added truth content of special revelation is essential (Rom. 10: 14-17).

**Personal.** "Through Jesus Christ revealed in inspired Scripture, man comes to know God *personally* in a redemptive relationship. From **knowing** things *about* God (His existence, perfections, and moral demands), man gains practical knowledge of God **himself** in personal **fellowship**."<sup>44</sup> While neoorthodoxy views special revelation solely in the person of Christ<sup>45</sup> and sees the Scriptures as **only** a "witness" to this divine revelation, "evangelical Christianity acknowledges both the living Word and the written Word as **revelation**."<sup>46</sup>

The neoorthodox restriction of revelation to a nonpropositional personal encounter with God [who is "wholly other"] similarly fails to do justice to the full range of biblical teaching. Although the [Living] Word represents the highest form of the divine self-disclosure, Scripture scarcely limits God's revelation to this important modality.<sup>47</sup>

It is through the special revelation of Scripture that one comes to know Jesus Christ. "These **are** written that you may believe [**keep** on **believing**] that **Jesus** is the Christ, the Son of God" (J o h n 20:31).

**Understandable.** In the **special** revelation of Scripture, God revealed himself in anthropic form, that is, in the character of human language at the time, using human categories of thought and action. Erickson has a helpful section dealing

<sup>44</sup>Demarest, *General Revelation*, 247.

<sup>45</sup>Neoorthodoxy does not mean the historic Christ, i.e. Jesus, but the Christ proclaimed in the church.

<sup>46</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1, 80. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, chap. 1 for the viewpoint of neoorthodoxy.

<sup>47</sup>Demarest, *General Revelation*, 128.

with the language equivalence used in God's verbal communication. He distinguishes between the terms "univocal" (a word having only one **meaning**—e.g., tall) and "equivocal" (a word possessing completely different **meanings**—e.g., row in "row a boat" and "a row of corn plants") and suggests that Scripture uses analogical language (between univocal and **equivocal**—e.g., run in "running a race" and "a motor running").

In analogical usage, there is always at least some univocal element. ... Whenever God has revealed himself, he has selected elements which are univocal in his universe and ours. ... [U]sing the term **analogical**, we mean "qualitatively the same"; in other words, the difference is one of degree rather than of kind or genus.<sup>48</sup>

That is, when the Bible uses words such as "love," "give," "obey," or "trust," they convey the same basic meaning to us as they do to God (at the same time, His love, for example, is far greater than ours). In this way it is possible for God to communicate Scripture through verbally rational **propositions**.

What makes this analogical knowledge possible is that it is God who selects the components which he uses. . . .

God . . . knowing all things completely, therefore knows which elements of human knowledge and experience are sufficiently similar to the divine truth that they can be used to help construct a meaningful analogy.<sup>49</sup>

Since this analogical concept of communication cannot be verified by human reason alone, for we do not have all the facts, one embraces this presupposition as a matter of faith. However, it is rationally defensible in light of Scripture's own **claim** to be a divine revelation.

Humanity is dependent on God for special revelation. Because one knows only the human sphere of knowledge and experience (and that to a minimal degree) one is unable to develop any valid special revelation. Only God has knowledge of God and only God can make himself known. Since God has chosen to reveal himself analogically, we can apprehend God. However, because the finite cannot **fully** grasp the In-

<sup>48</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 179-80.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 180-81.

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finite, we will never know God exhaustively. "God always remains *incomprehensible*. ... Although *what we know* of him is the same as his knowledge of himself, the degree of our knowledge is much *less*."<sup>50</sup> The knowledge of God through Scripture is limited-but true and sufficient.

**Progressive.** God did not *reveal* all the truth He wanted to convey about himself and His ways in Scripture all at one time, but over a period of about fifteen centuries (Heb. 1:1-2). Special revelation was progressive, not in the sense of a gradual evolutionary development, but in the sense of later revelation building upon earlier revelation. "This does not mean a movement in special revelation from untruth to truth but from a lesser to a fuller **disclosure**."<sup>51</sup> The very earliest revelation was true and accurately presented the message of God. Later revelation served to complement or supplement what God had disclosed before, but never to correct or contradict it. The whole of His revelation was to teach humankind who He is, how to be reconciled to Him, and how to live acceptably before Him.

**Recorded** Certainly the modes of special revelation are not limited to the Scriptures. God has revealed himself in His mighty redemptive acts, through His prophets and apostles, and most dramatically through His Son (Heb. 1:1). One might wonder why God thought it necessary or important to have much of this revelation written down, creating the Scriptures as a unique special revelation of himself. What follows are three plausible reasons.

First, an objective standard by which to test the claims of religious belief and practice is needed. Subjective experience is too obscure and variable to provide assurance on the nature and will of God. Considering the eternal significance of God's message to humanity, what was needed was not an "uncertain sound" but a "more sure word" (1 Cor. 14:8; 2 Pet. 1:19, **KJV**). A written standard of revelation provides the certainty and confidence of "thus says the Lord."

Second, a written divine revelation ensures the completeness and continuity of God's self-disclosure. Since special revelation is progressive, with later building on earlier, it is important that each occasion of revelation be recorded for a fuller understanding of God's complete message. Generally speaking, the continuity of the Old Testament with the New

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 180.<sup>51</sup>Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, 37.CHAPTER  
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Testament allows one to understand with greater clarity the message of redemption. Specifically, one would have a difficult time understanding the Letter to the Hebrews without knowing about the sacrificial system detailed in the **Pentateuch**. Therefore, by having the "whole" inscripturated, the "parts" are more meaningful.

Third, an inscripturated revelation best preserves the truth of God's message in integral form. Over long periods of time, memory and tradition tend toward decreasing trustworthiness. The crucial content of God's revelation must be accurately handed down to succeeding generations. The message one receives about God today must contain the same truth revealed to Moses or David or Paul. Books have been the best method of preserving and transmitting truth in its integrity from generation to generation.

**Transmitted** By holding special revelation from God in a permanent form, the Bible is both a record and an interpreter of God and His ways. God's written revelation is confined to the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. The whole of His revelation that He wanted preserved for the benefit of all humankind is stored in its integrity in the Bible. To search the Scriptures is to **find** God as He wants to be known (John 5:39; Acts 17:11). God's revelation is not a fleeting glimpse, but a permanent disclosure. He invites one to return again and again to Scripture and there to learn of Him.

God's revelatory acts and His self-disclosing words are brought together in the Scriptures. "The revelation of mighty deeds of God without revelation of the meaning of those deeds is like a television show without sound track; it throws man helplessly back upon his own human guesses as to the divine meaning of what God is **doing**."<sup>52</sup> The Bible faithfully records God's acts and enhances our understanding of them by providing God's own interpretation of those acts. "The deeds could not be understood unless accompanied by the divine **word**."<sup>53</sup> Revelation events along with their inspired interpretation are indivisibly unified in the Bible.

The Bible not only stores the revelation of God, but also brings that historical revelation to us in the present. Even Moses indicated the importance of writing down God's **rev-**

<sup>52</sup>Kenneth S. Kantzer, "The Christ-Revelation as Act and Interpretation" in *Jesus of Nazareth: Savior and Lord*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1966), 252.<sup>53</sup>George E. Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 27.



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elation so that it would benefit God's people on later occasions as well (Deut. 31:24–26). God has spoken in the past, and through the record in Scripture He continues to speak. "What Scripture says, God Says." The divine Word is cast into permanent form in Scripture, which is the durable vehicle of special revelation and provides the conceptual framework in which we meet ... **God**.<sup>54</sup> What God said to others in the past, He now says to us through the Scriptures.

Debate often ensues over whether the Bible is the Word of God or merely contains the Word of God. Actually, both ideas are true, only from different perspectives. Revelation that preceded its inscripturation was later recorded as part of the Scripture message. Therefore the Bible record contains the Word of God that may have come to someone long before it was written down. For example, the Bible contains the record of God's speaking to Abraham or to Jacob (Gen. 12: 1; 46:2). This fact, however, does not warrant the **Barthian** distinction between God's Word as divine and its record in Scripture as human.<sup>55</sup> Rather, the Bible is "a divine-human book in which every word is at once divine and **human**."<sup>56</sup> The whole of Scripture is the Word of God by virtue of the divine inspiration of its human authors. God's Word in the form of the Bible is an inspired record of events and truths of divine self-disclosure. Benjamin B. **Warfield** emphasizes that Scripture is not merely "the record of the redemptive acts by which God is saving the world, but [is] itself one of these redemptive acts, having its own part to play in the great work of establishing and building up the kingdom of **God**."<sup>57</sup>

A key issue in this debate is whether God can and has revealed himself in propositional form. Neoorthodoxy views God's revelation as "personal but nonpropositional," while Evangelicalism views it as personal, "cognitive and **propositional**."<sup>58</sup> How one defines revelation determines whether the Bible is coextensive with special revelation. If revelation is defined only as the act or process of revealing, then Scripture

<sup>54</sup>Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 34.

<sup>55</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 99ff.

<sup>56</sup>Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Divine and Human in the Bible" in *The Princeton Theology 1812–1921*, ed. Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 278.

<sup>57</sup>Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), 16 1.

<sup>58</sup>Carl F. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 3 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1979), 455.

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is not revelation, for revelation often occurred long before it was written down. If, however, revelation is defined also as the result, or product, of what God revealed, then Scripture as an accurate record of the original revelation is also entitled to be called special **revelation**.<sup>59</sup>

## THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

## RIVALS OF SCRIPTURE

Historically, the Christian Church has acknowledged the authority of Scripture in matters of faith and practice. This does not mean there have not been, and continue to be, rivals to the Bible's claim of full authority. These rivals have tended to subordinate, qualify, or equal the authority of Scripture. The earliest rival was oral tradition. Alongside the written Word, religious stories and teachings circulated widely. However, oral transmission, regardless of the topic, is subject to alteration, development, change, and deviation. Scripture supplied a standard, a point of reference for the oral word. Therefore, where oral tradition accords with Scripture it reflects Scripture's authority; however, where it deviates from the written Word its authority vanishes.

A second claim to religious authority is the church. Roman Catholics hold to this because the Church was divinely established by Christ; it proclaimed the gospel before it was inscripturated. Roman Catholics also claim it was the institution that produced the New Testament Scriptures and in some sense it established the canon of Scripture. In practice the Catholic Church places itself above Scripture. Although originally it held to the supremacy of Scripture, by the time of the Reformation it had exalted its traditions to the level of Scripture. More significantly the Catholic Church insisted that the teachings of the Bible could rightly be mediated only through the church hierarchy. Subtly the Roman Church had usurped the authority of the Scriptures and vested it in their guarded teachings. Consequently, the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformers was *Sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone")! The Bible given by God speaks with God's authority directly to the individual. It does "not need Popes or Councils to tell us, as from God, what it means; it can actually challenge Papal and conciliar pronouncements, convince them of being un-

<sup>59</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 196–97.

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godly and untrue, and require the faithful to part company with **them**.<sup>60</sup>

Where the Church speaks biblically it speaks with **author-ity**; where it does not, individuals may reject and challenge any claim to authority it makes. Such is the case with any ecclesiastical voice of authority, not just that of the Roman Catholic Church.

Creeds, confessions, and other church standards have also at times, consciously or unconsciously, been allowed to rival the authority of Scripture. Throughout history, churches and church leaders properly have spoken out on important issues of life and doctrine. Godly persons, greatly gifted by God, have labored to set forth Christian standards designed to reflect the attitude and will of God. Over and over again these documents have been looked to for authoritative direction. However, the writers would no doubt be the **first** to acknowledge that their works are fallible and open to revision, though one easily recognizes the significant biblical scholarship behind those important writings. Further, **all** the great creeds of the church acknowledge the full authority of Scripture. These godly efforts should be appreciated. God has used them for His glory. However, they must be kept in their proper relationship to Scripture. To allow them to rival scriptural authority destroys their own normative value and debases the Word of God they desire to honor. The acknowledgment of the unique authority of Scripture establishes the **value** of these other standards.

The authority of Scripture has also been challenged by what some view as the authority of an individual's personal encounter with God. That is, the person's encounter with the Living Word, rather than with the written Word, is paramount. Those who hold this view say the Bible may be used to help bring about such an encounter; however, the Bible "does not have authority of itself, but rather by virtue of the God to whom it witnesses and who speaks in its **pages**."<sup>61</sup> This is subtly different from saying that the Bible is authoritative because it is inherently the Word of God. Existentialists be-

<sup>60</sup>J. I. Packer, "Sola Scriptura in History and Today," in *God's Inert-ant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 45.

<sup>61</sup>John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), 31.

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lieve that through encounter with God "the Bible must become again and again His Word to us."<sup>62</sup>

It is true that the Christian's authority is more than paper and ink, but "God's propositional revelation ... cannot ... be distinguished from divine **self-revelation**."<sup>63</sup> No authoritative encounter with God supersedes the authority of His written Word. Otherwise the "experience of God" of the Hindu mystics or of one using mind-altering drugs could claim equal authority. The validity of one's encounter with God is determined by the authority of the Scriptures which disclose Him. All personal experiences must be checked and judged by Scripture.

Even the Holy Spirit has been viewed by some as a rival of biblical authority. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones sees **Pentecostalism** and Roman Catholicism at opposite extremes in such areas as structure and hierarchy, yet very similar in their emphasis on authority. Catholicism emphasizes the authority of the Church, while some **Pentecostals** seem to emphasize the authority of the Spirit above that of the **Word**.<sup>64</sup> Erickson cites an interesting 1979 Gallup poll that showed that a greater number of eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds chose the Holy Spirit rather than the Bible as their main religious **authority**.<sup>65</sup> Some elevate a "direct impression" of the Holy Spirit or a manifestation of the Spirit, such as prophecy, above the written **Word**.<sup>66</sup> The Holy Spirit is the one who inspired the Word and who makes it authoritative. He will not say anything contrary to or beyond what the inspired Word declares.

These rival claims to religious authority are joined by a host of world religions and religious cults. Is Jesus to be believed over Sun Myung Moon? Is the Koran as authoritative as the Bible? Does a word of modern prophecy carry the authority of Scripture? These and other practical questions make it essential for one to consider seriously the evidences for biblical authority. Virtually **all** religions have their sacred scriptures. Although many of them may contain worthy **moral**

<sup>62</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 110.

<sup>63</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 3, 462.

<sup>64</sup>David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authority* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1958), 7, 8. It should be noted, however, that the Statement of Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of Cod puts the inspiration and authority of Scripture in first place.

<sup>65</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 244-45.

<sup>66</sup>In doing so they ignore the Bible's direction that "others should weigh carefully what is said" (1 Cor. 14:29).

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teachings, Christianity has historically 'maintained that the Bible is uniquely and exclusively the Word of God.

## EVIDENCES TO THE AUTHENTICITY OF SCRIPTURE

The following paragraphs present some of the evidences for identifying the Bible as God's Word.

**Internal Support.** It is legitimate to look for the source and character of a writing by examining the contents of the writing itself. The Bible provides convincing internal testimony to its unique authority as a message from God. "It is . . . the positive internal evidence of a Divine origin which gives power and authority to the claims of the **Bible**."<sup>67</sup>

The Bible displays an amazing unity and consistency in its content considering the great diversity in its writing. It was written over a period of approximately fifteen centuries by more than forty authors from varied walks of life—politician, fisherman, farmer, doctor, king, soldier, rabbi, shepherd, and others. They wrote in different places (e.g., wilderness, palace, prison) and during varied circumstances (e.g., war, exile, travel). Some wrote history, some wrote law, and some wrote poetry. Literary genres range from allegory to biography to personal correspondence. All had their own backgrounds and experiences and their own strengths and weaknesses. They wrote on **different** continents, in three languages, and covered hundreds of topics. Yet their writings combine to form a consistent whole that beautifully unfolds the story of God's relationship to humanity. "It is not a superficial unity, but a profound unity. . . . The more deeply we study the more complete do we find the unity to **be**."<sup>68</sup>

Josh McDowell tells an interesting story comparing the Bible to the *Great Books of the Western World*. Although the set of books comprised many different authors, the sales representative admitted it offered no "unity" but was a "conglomeration."<sup>69</sup> "[T]he Bible is not simply an anthology; there is a unity which binds the whole together. An anthology is

<sup>67</sup>Charles Hodge, "The Scriptures Are the Word of God" in *The Princeton Theology 1812–1921*, ed. Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 133.

<sup>68</sup>Reuben A. Torrey, *The Bible and Its Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1904), 26.

<sup>69</sup>Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidence for the Christian Faith* (San Bernadino, Calif.: Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1972), 19–20.

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compiled by an anthologist, but no anthologist compiled the **Bible**."<sup>70</sup> Such extraordinary unity can be explained most plausibly as the result of the revelation by one God."

The Bible, being correlated with the complex nature of the human person, addresses every essential area of one's life. As a person reads the Bible, the Bible in turn reads the person. Although written centuries ago, it speaks forcefully to the human needs of each generation. It is the voice of God penetrating to the very core of one's being, providing reasonable answers to the ultimate questions of life (Heb. 4:12–13). God's Word continually directs the reader toward God as the source of meaning and purpose for oneself and for one's world. For the one who embraces its message, the Word has a transforming power. It creates faith in the heart and brings that person into a dynamic encounter with the living God (Rom. 10:17).

Scripture sets forth an ethical standard that surpasses what would be expected of ordinary men and women. It calls one to a morality that exceeds one's own measure of righteousness. "Each of these writings . . . has represented moral and religious ideas greatly in advance of the age in which it has appeared, and these ideas still lead the **world**."<sup>72</sup> The Bible deals frankly with human failure and the problem of sin. Its ethical system is comprehensive, including all areas of life. The concern of biblical ethics is not merely what one does but who one is. Adherence to an external code falls short of the Bible's demand for internal goodness (1 Sam. 16:7; Matt. 5; 15:8). Both one's moral failure and moral redemption are understood only in terms of one's relationship to a holy God. Through the Bible, God **calls** one not to reformation but to transformation by becoming a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:20–24).

Prophecies that speak of future events, many of them centuries in advance, pervade the Scriptures. The accuracy of these predictions, as demonstrated by their fulfillments, is absolutely remarkable. Scores of prophecies relate to Israel and the surrounding nations. For example, Jerusalem and its

<sup>70</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, rev. ed. (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 88.

<sup>71</sup>One of the reasons some ancient books were not included in the canon of Scripture was because they did not fit in or contribute to the harmony of Scripture. See the discussion on the canon.

<sup>72</sup>Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1907), 175.

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temple were to be rebuilt (Isa. 44:28); and Judah, although rescued from the Assyrians, would fall into Babylon's hands (Isa. 39:6; Jer. 25:9–12). The restorer of Judah, Cyrus of Persia, is named more than a century before His birth (Isa. 44:28).<sup>73</sup> The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies made hundreds of years before the actual events.<sup>74</sup> Included are predictions of Christ's virgin birth (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23), the place of His birth (Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:6), the manner of His death (Ps. 22:16; John 19:36), and the place of His burial (Isa. 53:9; Matt. 27:57–60)\*<sup>75</sup>.

Some critics, in redating various Old Testament books, have tried to minimize the predictive miracle of biblical prophecy. However, even if one would agree with the later dating, the prophecies would still have been written hundreds of years before the birth of Christ. (Since the Septuagint [LXX] translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was completed by about 250 B.C., this would indicate that the prophecies contained in those writings had to have been made prior to this date.)

Some have suggested the prophecies did not predict Jesus' activity, but that Jesus deliberately acted to **fulfill** what was said in the Old Testament. However, many of the specific predictions were beyond human control or manipulation. Nor were the fulfillments of the predictions just coincidences, considering the significant number of persons and events involved. Peter Stoner examined eight of the predictions about Jesus and concluded that in the life of one person the probability of even those eight's being coincidental was 1 in 10<sup>17</sup> (1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000).<sup>76</sup> The only rational explanation for so many accurate, specific, long-term predictions is that the omniscient God, who is sovereign over history, revealed such knowledge to the human writers.

**External Support** The Bible also has areas of external support for its claim to be a divine revelation. Who would deny its tremendous influence on human society? It has been printed in part or in whole in nearly two thousand languages and

<sup>73</sup>Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 48.

<sup>74</sup>Floyd Hamilton, *The Basis of Christian Faith* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), 297.

<sup>75</sup>McDowell, *Evidence*, chaps. 9 and 11. Josh McDowell provides ninety pages of analysis of biblical predictive prophecies and their fulfillments.

<sup>76</sup>Peter W. Stoner, *Science Speaks* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 106.

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read by more people than any other book in history. '- **Recognizing** its wisdom and value, believer and nonbeliever quote it in support of their causes. Claim has been made that the Bible, if lost, could be reconstructed in all its principal parts from the quotations made in the books sitting on the shelves of public libraries. Its principles have served as the foundation for the laws of civilized nations and as the impetus for the great social reforms of history. "The Bible ... has produced the highest results in all walks of life. It has led to the highest type of creations in the fields of art, architecture, literature, and music .... Where is there a book in all the world that even remotely compares with it in its beneficent **influence** upon **mankind**?"<sup>78</sup>

God is at work, impacting society through the lives changed by following the teachings of His Word (Ps. 33:12).

The accuracy of the Bible in all areas, including persons, places, customs, events, and science, has been substantiated through history and archaeology. At times the Bible was thought to be in error, but later discoveries time after time have attested to its truthfulness. For example, it was once thought that there was no writing until after the time of Moses. Now we know that writing goes back before 3000 B.C. Critics once denied the existence of Belshazzar. Excavations identify him by his Babylonian name, Bel-shar-usur. Critics said the Hittites, mentioned twenty-two times in the Bible, never existed. Now we know the Hittites were a major power in the Middle East.<sup>79</sup>

Biblical history is corroborated by the secular histories of the nations involved with Israel. Archaeological discoveries continue to support and help interpret the biblical text. McDowell shares an interesting quotation from a conversation between Earl Radmacher, president of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, and Nelson Glueck, archaeologist and former president of a Jewish theological seminary:

I've been accused of teaching the verbal, plenary inspiration of the

<sup>78</sup>By 1992 the Scripture had been translated into many languages: 1,964 living languages had some Scripture; 276 languages had the whole Bible; 676 had the entire New Testament. Barbara F. Grimes, ed. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 12th ed. (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1992), 931:

<sup>79</sup>Thiessen, *Systematic Theology*, 47.

<sup>80</sup>Keith N. Schoville, *Biblical Archaeology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 194.

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scripture. ... **All** I have ever said is that in all of my archaeological investigation I have never found one artifact of antiquity that contradicts any statement of the Word of **God**.<sup>80</sup>

The same judgment is rendered by renowned archaeologist William F. Albright.

The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ... **has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history.**<sup>81</sup>

**Even those** religious scholars who deny total accuracy of the Bible on philosophical grounds (e.g., human authors demand human error) are hard pressed to substantiate their claim of inaccuracies in the biblical text. Kenneth Kantzer comments, "Though Barth continued to assert the presence of errors in Scripture, it is exceedingly **difficult** to locate any instances in his writing where he sets forth any particular error in **Scripture**."<sup>82</sup> Considering the multitude of details in the Bible, one would expect a considerable collection of errors. Its amazing accuracy points to revelation from the God who is true.

The remarkable survivability of the Bible also attests to its divine authority. Comparatively few books survive the ravages of time. How many thousand-year-old writings can one name? A book that survives a century is a rare book. Yet the Bible has not **only** survived, it has thrived. There are literally thousands of biblical manuscripts, more than for any ten pieces of classical literature **combined**.<sup>83</sup>

\*McDowell, *Evidence*, 24.

<sup>81</sup>William F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, revised ed. (New York: Pelican Books, 1960), 127–28.

<sup>82</sup>Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Biblical Authority: Where Both Fundamentalists and Neoevangelicals Are Right," *Christianity Today*, 7 October 1983, 12.

<sup>83</sup>The New Testament in the original Greek is found in 88 papyri, 257 uncial (capital letter) leather manuscripts, 2,795 minuscule (small letter) manuscripts, and over 2,200 lectionaries (manuscripts with New Testament portions arranged for daily or weekly readings). See Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 102, 105, 128, 160. This compares with *Homer's Iliad*, which is preserved in 457 papyri, 2 uncial manuscripts, and 188 minuscule manuscripts. See Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 34.

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What makes **this survival so remarkable is that the Bible** has faced numerous periods of ecclesiastical restraint (e.g., during the Middle Ages) and governmental attempts to **eliminate** it. From Diocletian's edict in 303 to destroy every copy of the Bible to the present day, there have been organized efforts to suppress or exterminate the Bible. "Not only has **the Bible** received more veneration and adoration than any other book, but it has also been the object of more persecution and **opposition**."<sup>84</sup> Considering that in the early centuries of Christianity Scripture was copied by hand, the utter extinction of the Bible would not have been humanly impossible. The noted French deist Voltaire predicted that within one hundred years Christianity would fade away. Within **fifty** years of his death in 1778, the Geneva Bible Society used his press and house to produce stacks of **Bibles**!<sup>85</sup> Only if the Bible is indeed God's redemptive message to humanity is its indestructibility not so amazing: God has kept His omnipotent hand on His Word.

Both the authenticity and **historicity** of the New Testament documents are solidly **affirmed**. Norman Geisler points out that the manuscript evidence for the New Testament is overwhelming and provides a solid basis for reconstructing the original Greek **text**.<sup>86</sup> Textual scholar Bruce Metzger says that in the third century B.C. Alexandrian scholars indicated that the copies of the *Iliad* they had were about **95** percent accurate. He also indicates that northern and southern texts of India's **Mahābhārata** differ in extent by twenty-six thousand **lines**.<sup>87</sup> This in contrast to "over **99.5** percent accuracy for the New Testament manuscript **copies**."<sup>88</sup> That final half percent consists mostly of copyists' errors in spelling, etc., where the original cannot be determined. No doctrine of the Bible depends on any of those texts.

## JESUS' VIEW OF SCRIPTURES

The writing of the New Testament books was completed by the end of the first century at the latest, many of them

"Emery H. Bancroft, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1949), 360.

<sup>85</sup>Sidney Collett, *All About the Bible*, 20th ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1934), 63.

<sup>86</sup>Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 308.

<sup>87</sup>Bruce M. Metzger, *Chapters in the History of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), 148–51.

<sup>88</sup>Geisler, *Apologetics*, 308

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within twenty to thirty years of Jesus' death. We have the assurance also that even the recounting of events by the writers was superintended by the Holy Spirit to prevent human error that might be caused by forgetfulness (John 14:26). The Gospels, detailing the life of Jesus, were written by contemporaries and eyewitnesses. These well-attested New Testament writings provide accurate, reliable information about Christ and His teachings. The authority of the written Word is anchored in the authority of Jesus. Since He is presented as God incarnate, His teachings are true and authoritative. Therefore, Jesus' teaching on Scripture determines its rightful claim to divine authority. Jesus gives consistent and emphatic testimony that it is the Word of God.

In particular, Jesus addressed His attention to the Old Testament. Whether speaking of Adam, Moses, Abraham, or Jonah, Jesus treated them as real persons in true historical narratives. At times He related current situations to an Old Testament historical event (Matt. 12:39–40). On other occasions He drew from an Old Testament happening to support or reinforce something He was teaching (Matt. 19:4–5). Jesus honored the Old Testament Scriptures, emphasizing that He did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). At times He castigated the religious leaders because they had wrongly elevated their own traditions to the level of Scripture (Matt. 15:3; 23:29).

In His own teaching Jesus himself cited at least **fifteen** Old Testament books and alluded to others. Both in tone and in specific statements He clearly demonstrated His regard for the Old Testament Scriptures as the Word of God. It was the word and commandment of God (Mark 7:6–13). Quoting Genesis 2:24 Jesus stated, "The Creator [not Moses] ... said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother' " (Matt. 19:4–5). He spoke of David's making a declaration "speaking by the Holy Spirit" (Mark 12:36). Concerning a statement recorded in Exodus 3:6, He asked, "Have you not read what God said to you?" (Matt. 22:31). Repeatedly Jesus claimed the authority of the Old Testament, citing the formula "It is written" (Luke 4:4). John W. Wenham asserts that Jesus understood this formula to be equivalent to "God says!"

"There is a grand and solid objectivity about the perfect tense *gegraptai*, 'it stands written': 'here is the permanent, unchangeable witness of the Eternal God, committed to writing for our instruction.'"<sup>90</sup> The decisiveness with which Jesus

<sup>90</sup>John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 22.

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wielded this formula says something emphatic about how Jesus regarded the authority of the writings of Scripture. "The written Word, then, is the authority of God for settling all disputes of doctrine or practice. It is God's Word in man's words; it is divine truth in human **terms**."<sup>90</sup> Those who would claim that Jesus simply accommodated himself to the Jewish understanding of Scripture and went along with their false beliefs miss entirely His emphatic tone and emphasis of full acceptance and authority. Rather than accommodate himself to the views of His day, He corrected their errors and raised Scripture again to its rightful place. Further, accommodation to falsehood is not morally possible for the God who is absolutely true (Num. 23: 19; Heb. 6:18).

Jesus claimed divine authority not only for the Old Testament Scriptures, but also for His own teachings. One who hears His sayings and does them is a wise person (Matt. 7:24) because His teachings are from God (John 7: 15–17; 8:26–28; 12:48–50; 14: 10). Jesus is the Sower, sowing the good seed of God's Word (Luke 8:1–13). His frequent expression "But I tell you" (Matt. 5:22), used side by side with an understanding of the Old Testament, demonstrated that "his words carry all the authority of God's **words**."<sup>91</sup> "Heaven and earth will pass away, but [**His**] words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

Jesus **also** indicated that there would be a special divine character to the witness of His followers to Him. He had trained them by word and example and commissioned them to be His witnesses throughout the whole world, teaching people to observe whatever He had commanded them (Matt. 28:18–20). He instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit whom the Father would send in His name, so that they would have power to be witnesses unto Him (Luke 24:49; John 14:26; Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit would remind the disciples of everything Jesus had said to them (John 14:26). The Spirit would teach them all things, testify about Christ, guide them into all truth, tell them what was yet to come, and take the things of Christ and make them known to the disciples (John 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:13–15).

Jesus' promises to His disciples were fulfilled. The Holy Spirit inspired some of them to write of their Lord. Consequently, in their writings, along with those of the Old Tes-

<sup>90</sup>Geisler, *Apologetics*, 362.

<sup>91</sup>Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 47.

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tament, the Bible makes the express and direct claim to be special revelation from God.<sup>92</sup>

## THE EXTENT OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

The Bible touches on a number of areas: economics, geography, culture, biology, politics, astronomy, and so forth; but it does not claim to be, nor should one regard it as, a textbook on all these subjects. Styles of dress, means of transportation, political structures, human custom, and the like are not intended to be followed simply because they are mentioned in the authoritative Scriptures. Although what is written in these areas is reliable, it is not necessarily normative or comprehensive. These areas lie outside scriptural authority except as they have theological or ethical implications. (For example, from the standpoint of Scripture it makes no difference if we ride a camel or a motorcycle, but it does make a difference whether we obtained either one honestly.)

The Bible's sixty-six books claim full and absolute authority in regard to God's self-revelation and all the implications for belief and practice that follow. Although the Bible's authority is historical because God has revealed himself in historical events, primarily its authority is theological. The Bible reveals God to humankind and sets forth His relationship to His creation. Because God is to be understood through this book, its words must be authoritative. The authority of the Word is absolute—God's own words about himself.

The Bible's ethical authority stems from its theological authority. It does not speak of all that should be done in every age or of all that was done in the times of its writing. However, the principles it sets forth, its standard of righteousness, its information about God, its message of redemption, and its lessons of life are authoritative for all ages.

Certain biblical passages are not binding on us today as far as conduct is concerned, but are authoritative in the sense that they reveal God in some relationship to humanity. For example, some of the Old Testament ceremonies have been **fulfilled** in Christ. "Where there is a relation of promise (or prefiguring) and fulfillment, the figure serves only a temporary purpose and ceases to have a binding status with the fulfill-

<sup>92</sup>See *Inspiration of Scripture*, pp. 93-97.

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ment."<sup>93</sup> Even though Christ is the fulfillment, the ceremonies authoritatively present an aspect of God's redemptive work. The relationship of God to human beings and the relationship of human beings to God have implications for every aspect of life. Therefore the Word bears authoritatively upon these other spheres of life.

The scope of Scripture's authority is as extensive as God's own authority in relationship to all areas of human existence. God is over all areas of life and speaks to all areas of life through His Word. The authority of the written Word is the authority of God himself. The Bible is not merely a record of God's authority in the past, but is God's authority today. Through the written Word the Holy Spirit continues to confront men and women with the claims of God. It is still "Thus says the Lord!"

## THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

God has revealed himself to His creation. Inspiration refers to the recording, or writing down, of this divine revelation. Since the Bible was written by human authors, it must be asked, "In what sense, if any, can their writings be called the Word of God?" A related issue concerns the degree, or extent, to which their writings can be viewed as revelation from God\*

## THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR INSPIRATION

Because any witness has the right of self-testimony, the claim of the biblical writers to divine inspiration will be examined **first**. Many of those who wrote the Scriptures were participants in or eyewitnesses of the events they wrote about.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard (1 John 1:1-3).

Whether Moses, David, Jeremiah, Matthew, John, Peter, or Paul, each wrote out of his own experiences as God revealed

<sup>93</sup>Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture," *Eternity*, August 1970, 20.

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himself in and through his life (Exod. 4:1-17; Ps. 32; Jer. 12; Acts 1:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:6-8; 2 Cor. 1:3-11; 2 Pet. 1:14-18). Yet their writings were more than the accounts of involved reporters. They claimed to write not only *about* God, but also *for* God. Their word was God's Word; their message was God's message.

Throughout the Old Testament one finds expressions such as "The LORD said to Moses, 'Tell ...'" (Exod. 14:1); "This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD" (Jer. 11:1); "Son of man ... say: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says. ...'" (Ezek. 39:1); "The LORD said to me ..." (Isa 8:1); or "This is what the LORD says ..." (Amos 2:1). These statements are used more than thirty-eight hundred times and clearly demonstrate **that** the writers were conscious of delivering an authoritative message from God.<sup>94</sup>

The New Testament writers were no less certain that they too were communicating on behalf of God. Jesus not only commanded the disciples to preach, but also told them what to preach (Acts 10:41-43). Their words were not "words taught ... by human wisdom but ... words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:13). They expected the people to acknowledge that what they were receiving was written as "the Lord's command" (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37). Paul could assure the Galatians "that what I am writing you is no lie" (Gal. 1:20), because he had received it from God (Gal. 1:6-20). The Thessalonians were commended for receiving their message "not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13). Commands were written to the Church in the name of Jesus, and failure to obey them was reason for disassociation from **the** disobedient person (2 Thess. 3:6-14). Just as God had spoken in and through the holy prophets, now commands were given by the Lord to His apostles (2 Pet. 3:2). Receiving eternal life was connected with believing God's testimony concerning His Son, which the disciples recorded (1 John 5:10-12).

In these and similar passages it is evident that the New Testament writers were convinced that they were declaring the "whole will of God" in obedience to the command of Christ and under the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:27). The New Testament writers also acknowledged the absolute authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, because God "spoke

<sup>94</sup>Thiessen, *Systematic Theology*, 68.

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by the Holy Spirit" through the human authors (Acts 4:24-25; Heb. 3:7; 10:15-16).

Paul wrote to Timothy that the Scriptures were able to make him "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). The value of Scripture is derived from its source. Paul indicates that its value goes beyond the immediate human writer to God himself. He **affirms**, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16, **KJV**). The term "inspiration" is derived from this verse and applied to the writing of the Scriptures. The Greek word used here is *theopneustos*, which literally means "God-breathed"; newer versions rightly read, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16, **NIV**). Paul is not saying that God breathed some divine characteristic into the human writings of Scripture or simply that all Scripture exudes or speaks of God. The Greek adjective (*theopneustos*) is clearly predicative and is used to identify the source of all Scripture.<sup>95</sup> God is the ultimate author. Therefore all Scripture is the voice of God, the Word of God (Acts 4:25; Heb. 1:5-13).

The context of 2 Timothy 3:16 has the Old Testament Scriptures in view; **the** explicit claim of Paul is that the whole Old Testament is an inspired revelation from God. The fact that the New Testament was just being written and was not yet complete prohibits such an internal explicit claim for it. However, some specific statements by the New Testament writers imply that the inspiration of Scripture extends to the whole Bible. For example, in 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul writes, "For the Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'" Paul is quoting from Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7, and he regards both **the** Old and New Testament quotations "as Scripture." Also, Peter refers to **all** the letters of Paul which, though they write of God's salvation, "contain some things that are hard to understand." Therefore some people "distort **[them]**, as they do the *other Scriptures*, to their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16, *italics added*). Notice that Peter puts all Paul's letters in the category of Scripture. To distort them is to distort the Word of God, resulting in destruction. The New Testament writers communicated "in words taught by the

<sup>95</sup>"Both Paul's usage and the Greek word order in 2 Tim. 3:16 call for the translation, 'All Scripture is inspired by God.'" The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary, Zeta-Kappa, vol. 13 in *The Complete Biblical Library* (Springfield, Mo.: The Complete Biblical Library, 1990), 87.



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Spirit, expressing spiritual truths" ( 1 Cor. 2: 13), even as Jesus had promised (John 14:26;16:13-15).

In his second epistle Peter speaks of his impending death and his desire to assure his readers of the truth of what he had previously shared with them. He tells them he did not invent clever but false stories and reminds them he was an eyewitness—he was with Christ, he heard and saw for himself (2 Pet. 1:12-18). Peter then proceeds to write of an even "more certain" word than his eyewitness testimony (2 Pet. 1: 19). Speaking of the Scriptures, he describes human authors as being "led along" (*pheromenoi*) by the Holy Spirit as they communicated the things of God. The result of the superintending of their activity by the Holy Spirit was a message not initiated by human design or produced by mere human reason and research (not that these were excluded). Peter says, 'You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

Peter's use of the term "prophecy of Scripture" is a case of *pars pro tota*: in this case, a part standing for the whole of Scripture. For the whole of Scripture, "the impetus which led to the writing was from the Holy Spirit. For this reason Peter's readers are to pay heed ... for it is not simply men's word, but God's word."<sup>96</sup>

Because of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, all Scripture is authoritative. Jesus spoke of even the least of the biblical commandments as important and binding.

**I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:18-19).**

Reward or judgment is predicated on one's relationship to even the least of the commandments. Accused of blasphemy because of His claim to deity, Jesus appealed to the phrase "you are 'gods' " found in Psalm 82:6. He built His defense against their charge of blasphemy on the well-accepted truth

<sup>96</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 20 1.

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that even a relatively obscure phrase of Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:34-35). The reason it could not be broken **was** that, as even a small portion of Scripture, it was still the authoritative Word of God.

## MODES OF INSPIRATION

Once the self-testimony of the Scriptures is accepted, the inspiration of Scripture is clear. As the human authors wrote, in some sense God himself was involved in the communication of their message. Since in most cases, however, the Bible does not reveal the psychology of inspiration, various understandings of the mode of inspiration have arisen. Five basic views are briefly considered in this section.

**Natural Intuition.** Inspiration is merely a natural insight into spiritual matters exercised by gifted persons. Just as some may have an aptitude for math or science, the biblical writers had an aptitude for religious ideas. No special involvement of God is seen. One might just as naturally be inspired to write a poem or to compose a hymn.

**Special Illumination** Inspiration is a divine intensification and exaltation of religious perceptions common to believers. The natural gifts of the biblical writers were in some way enhanced by the Holy Spirit, but without any special guidance or communication of divine truth.

**Dynamic Guidance.** Inspiration is a special guidance of the Holy Spirit given to the biblical writers to assure the communication of a message from God as it deals with matters of religious faith and godly living. Emphasis is on God's providing the writers with the thoughts or concepts He wanted communicated and allowing the human writers full, natural expression. The elements of religious faith and practice were directed, but so-called nonessential matters were wholly dependent on the human authors' own knowledge, experience, and choice.

**Verbal Plenary.** Inspiration is a combination of the writers' natural human expression and the Holy Spirit's special initiation and superintendence of their writings. However, the Holy Spirit not only directed the writers' thoughts or concepts, but also oversaw their selection of words for all that was written, not just for matters of faith and practice. The Holy Spirit guaranteed the accuracy and completeness of all that was written as being a revelation from God.

**Divine Dictation** Inspiration is the infallible superintendence of the mechanical reproduction of divine words as the

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Holy Spirit dictated them to the human writers. The Scripture writers were obedient stenographers writing under the Holy Spirit's special direction for content, words, and style.

## FORMULATING A VIEW OF INSPIRATION

A view of inspiration must take into account everything necessary for God's revelation to be accurately communicated. A proper mode of inspiration must include all the elements that the Bible **posits** in both the act of inspiring and the effects of that act. It must also give proper place to God's activity and to human activity.

As one examines the data of Scripture, a number of elements involved in the act of inspiring are clearly presented. ( 1) "All Scripture is God-breathed"; it proceeds from the mouth of God (2 Tim. 3:16). (2) The writers of **Scripture** were "carried along [*or* 'led along'] by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). (3) The writers did not speak from their own will, but from God's (2 Pet. 1:21). (4) Yet the writers did speak for themselves (Luke 20:42; John 12:39; Acts 3:22).

Likewise Scripture provides clear effects, or results, of the act of inspiring. ( 1) All Scripture is God-breathed and therefore all Scripture is the Word of God (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Tim. 3:16). (2) All Scripture is profitable and is a complete and **sufficient** rule for faith and practice (2 Tim. 5:16-17). (3) Not a single line of Scripture may be set aside, nullified, or destroyed; the whole of Scripture is to be taken in its full integrity (John 10:35). (4) Scripture is more certain than even empirical observation (2 Pet. 1:12-19). (5) No Scripture is conditioned as to its truthfulness by any limitation of its human author (2 Pet. 1:20). Normal historical conditioning as well as humankind's sinfulness and finiteness are **offset** by the Holy Spirit's superintendence.

In light of the preceding observations drawn from Scripture, an evaluation of the five suggested modes of inspiration can be made. Those views that regard inspiration as only some natural gift of illumination do not give proper attention to God's "breathing out" the Scripture. The dynamic guidance view, which sees matters of faith and life as inspired apart from other more mundane content, leaves no sure method of determining what is inspired and what is not. Nor does it address the explicit biblical claim that all Scripture is inspired, even the most obscure verses.

The divine dictation view of inspiration does not give proper

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recognition to the human element—the peculiar styles, expressions, and emphases of the individual writers.

The verbal plenary view of inspiration avoids the pitfalls of emphasizing God's activity to the neglect of human participation, or of emphasizing the human contribution to the neglect of God's involvement. The whole of Scripture is inspired, as the writers wrote under the Holy Spirit's direction and guidance, while allowing for variety in literary style, grammar, vocabulary, and other human peculiarities. After all, some of the biblical writers had, in God's providence, gone through long **years** of unique experience and preparation, which God chose to use to communicate His message (e.g., Moses, Paul).

**The** dynamic guidance and verbal plenary views of inspiration are widely held, for these views recognize the work of the Holy Spirit as well as the obvious differences in the vocabularies and styles of the writers. A major difference between the two views involves the extent of inspiration. Acknowledging the Holy Spirit's guidance, how far did this guidance extend? With regard to the Scripture writings, proponents of various dynamic views would suggest the Spirit's guidance extended to mysteries unattainable by reason, *or* only to the message of salvation, or only to the words of Christ, or perhaps to certain materials (such as didactic or prophetic sections or maybe to **all** matters relating to Christian faith and practice). Verbal plenary inspiration maintains that the guidance of the Holy Spirit extended to every word of the original documents (i.e., the autographs).

With regard to the Spirit's guidance of the writer, the dynamic guidance view would suggest the Spirit's influence extended to only the initial impulse to write or to only the selection of topics, the subject matter, or to just the writer's thoughts and concepts—to be expressed as the writer saw fit. In verbal plenary inspiration the Spirit's guidance extended to even the words the writer chose to express his thoughts. The Holy Spirit did not dictate the words, but guided the writer so that he freely chose the words *that* truly expressed God's message. (For example, the writer may have chosen the word "house" or "building" according to his preference, but could not have chosen "field" since that would have changed the content of the **message**.)<sup>97</sup>

<sup>97</sup>The Bible indicates that God's guidance began from the point of conception (Jer. 1:5). The Holy Spirit led the writers along not only while they wrote, but also through all their experiences and development so that even their vocabulary was prepared to write the truth in the way the Holy Spirit wanted it to be recorded.

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Any combination of the suggestions of the dynamic **guidance** view involves one in a relative stance on the subject of the extent of inspiration. This relative stance requires that some principle be employed to differentiate between inspired and noninspired (or lesser and greater inspired) portions of Scripture. Several principles have been suggested: whatever is reasonable, whatever is needful for salvation, whatever is valuable for faith and practice, whatever is Word-bearing (*i.e.*, points to Christ), whatever is genuine kerygma, or whatever the Spirit bears special witness to. All such principles are essentially human-centered and subjective. Also, there is the problem of who shall employ the principle and actually make the determination. Church hierarchy, biblical scholars and theologians, and individual believers would all want to make the choice. In an ultimate sense the dynamic guidance view ends with the Bible's authority being derived from humanity rather than God. Only the verbal plenary view of inspiration avoids the quagmire of theological relativity while accounting for human variety by recognizing that inspiration extends to the whole of Scripture.

Verbal plenary inspiration essentially carries its definition in its name. It is the belief that the Bible is inspired even to the very words (verbal) that were chosen by the writers. It is plenary (full, all, every) inspiration in that all of the words in all of the autographs are inspired. A more technical definition of inspiration from a verbal plenary perspective might read something like this: Inspiration is a special superintending act of the Holy Spirit whereby the writers of the Scriptures were motivated to write, were guided in their writing even to their employment of words, and were kept from all error or omission.

At the same time, although every word is inspired by God, whether or not it is true depends on its context. That is, it may authoritatively record a lie; it is an inspired, true record of a lie. For example, when the serpent told Eve she would not die if she ate of the forbidden fruit, it was lying-she would die! (Gen. 3:4-5). However, because the whole of Scripture is inspired, the false words of the tempter are accurately recorded.

Verbal plenary inspiration was the view of the Early Church. During the first eight centuries of the Church no major church leader held to any other view, and it was the view of virtually all orthodox Christian churches until the eighteenth cen-

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tury.<sup>98</sup> Verbal plenary inspiration continues to be the view of Evangelicalism.

Verbal plenary inspiration elevates the concept of inspiration to full infallibility since all the words are ultimately God's words. Scripture is infallible because it is God's Word and God is infallible. In recent years some have attempted to support the concept of verbal plenary inspiration without the corollary of infallibility. In response, books have been written, conferences held, and organizations formed to try to shore up the historical understanding of inspiration. "Limited **inerrancy**" as opposed to "limited errancy" has been debated. A string of qualifiers has been added to "verbal plenary" until some would insist the view be called "verbal plenary, infallible, inerrant, unlimited inspiration." When one investigates what all these qualifiers mean, it is exactly what "verbal plenary inspiration" meant from the beginning!

## BIBLICAL INERRANCY

One notable change in terminology resulting from all the discussion in the area of the inspiration of Scripture is the preference for the term "inerrancy" over "**infallibility**." This probably has to do with the insistence of some that one could have an infallible message but an errant biblical text.

"Infallibility" and "inerrancy" are terms used to speak of the truthfulness of Scripture. The Bible does not fail; it does not err; it is true in all that it **affirms** (Matt. 5:17-18; John 10:35). Although these terms may not have always been used, the early church fathers, the Roman Catholic theologians, the Protestant Reformers, modern **evangelicals** (and therefore "classical" **Pentecostals**), all have **affirmed** a Bible that is entirely true, without room for falsehood or **error**.<sup>99</sup> Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory Naziansus, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and a host of other giants of church history acknowledge the Bible as breathed out by

<sup>98</sup>In the ninth century, Scholasticism began to assert reason over biblical authority through the School Men such as John Scotus. See "The Church Doctrine of Biblical Authority," Jack B. Rogers, *The Authoritative Word*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983); Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*,- Robert D. Preus, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church Through Luther," in *Inerrancy*, Norman L. Geisler, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).

<sup>99</sup>Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 74, 154.

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God and entirely true. Listen to the emphatic **affirmation** of a few of these notables:

Augustine: "I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from **error**."<sup>100</sup>

Martin Luther: "The Scriptures never **err**."<sup>101</sup> "... where the Holy Scripture establishes something that must be believed, there we must not deviate from the **words**."<sup>102</sup>

John Calvin: "The sure and infallible record." "The certain and unerring rule." "Infallible Word of God." "Free from every stain or **defect**."<sup>103</sup>

Probably two of the most significant historical developments regarding the doctrine of infallibility and inerrancy have been the statement on Scripture in The *Lausanne Covenant* (1974) and the *Chicago Statement* (1978) of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. The Lausanne statement offers what some regard as too great a flexibility in its declaration that the Bible is "inerrant in all that it **affirms**." (That is, some things may not be "**affirmed**" in the Bible.) In response, the *Chicago Statement* affirmed: "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**."<sup>104</sup>

The *Chicago Statement* was adopted by a gathering of nearly three hundred evangelical scholars in an effort to clarify and strengthen the evangelical position on the doctrine of **inerrancy**. It comprises nineteen Articles of Affirmation and Denial, with an extended closing exposition, designed to describe and explain inerrancy in a way that leaves absolutely no room for any errors of any kind in any part of the Bible.

While it may be questioned whether inerrancy is taught deductively in Scripture, it is the conclusion supported by inductive examination of the doctrine of Scripture taught by Jesus and the biblical writers. It should be made clear, how-

<sup>100</sup>Augustine, "The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustine, with a Sketch of His Life and Work," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, reprint 1988), letter 32.

<sup>101</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 34.

<sup>102</sup>Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 373.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid. 39 1.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid. Kenneth Kantzer's doctoral dissertation is an excellent defense of Calvin's view on inerrancy.

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ever, that the Bible's authority rests on the truth of the inspiration, not on a doctrine of inerrancy. Inerrancy is a natural inference that follows inspiration and is "drawn from the scriptural teaching and is fully supported by Jesus' own **attitude**."<sup>105</sup> Some have suggested that surrender of the doctrine of infallibility is the first step to surrender of biblical authority.

Inerrancy recognizes apparent contradictions or inconsistencies in the text not as actual errors, but as **difficulties** that can **be** resolved when all the relevant data are known. The possibility of harmonizing apparently contradictory passages has often **been demonstrated by evangelical scholars who have patiently reviewed textual difficulties in light of new historical, archaeological, and linguistic discoveries.** (One should, however, avoid forced or highly speculative harmonizations.)

The doctrine of inerrancy is derived more from the character of the Bible than merely from examining its phenomena. "If one believes the Scripture to be God's Word, he cannot fail to believe it inerrant."<sup>106</sup> God breathed out these words that were written down and God cannot lie. Scripture does not err because God does not lie. Consequently, inerrancy is an expected property of inspired Scripture. The critic who insists on errors in the Bible in difficult passages seems to have usurped for himself the infallibility he has denied the Scriptures. An erring standard provides no sure measurement of truth and error. The result of denying inerrancy is the loss of a trustworthy Bible. When errors are admitted, divine truthfulness is surrendered and certainty vanishes.

## DEFINITION OF INERRANCY

Although the terms "infallibility" and "inerrancy" historically have been virtually synonymous for Christian doctrine, in recent years many evangelicals have preferred one term over the other. Some have preferred the term "inerrancy" to distinguish themselves from those who held that infallibility may refer to the truthful message of the Bible without necessarily meaning the Bible contains no errors. Others have preferred the term "infallibility" to avoid possible misunderstandings due to an overly restrictive definition of inerrancy. Presently the term "inerrancy" seems to be more in vogue

<sup>105</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 4 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1979), 164.

<sup>106</sup>Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 74.

*than* “infallibility.” Therefore, the following series of statements attempt to set bounds for a definition of verbal **inerrancy** that would be widely accepted in the evangelical community.

1. God’s truth is accurately expressed without any error in the very words of Scripture as they are used to construct intelligible sentences.

2. God’s truth is accurately expressed through all the words of the whole of Scripture, not just the words of religious or theological content.

3. God’s truth is inerrantly expressed directly only in the autographs (original writings) and indirectly in the apographs (copies of the original writings).

4. Inerrancy allows for the “language of appearance,” approximations, and varying noncontradictory descriptions from different perspectives. (For example, to say the sun rises is not an error but a recognized perceptive description.)

5. Inerrancy recognizes the use of symbolic, figurative language and a variety of literary forms to convey truth.

6. Inerrancy understands that New Testament quotations of Old Testament statements may be paraphrases and may not be intended to be word-for-word renderings.

7. Inerrancy considers the cultural and historical methods of reporting such things as genealogies, measurements, and statistics to be valid, rather than requiring today’s modern methods of technological precision.

From these seven statements it is hoped that one can construct a view of inerrancy that avoids extremes while taking seriously the self-testimony of Scripture to its accuracy and truthfulness. However, our attempts to define inerrancy are not themselves inerrant. Therefore, while endeavoring to influence others to acknowledge the doctrine of inerrancy, it would be well to heed the wise, loving advice of respected inerrantist Kenneth Kantzer. “Conservative **evangelicals**, especially, must take great care, lest by too hasty a recourse to direct confrontation they edge into unorthodoxy the wavering scholar or student troubled either by problems in the biblical text or by some of the common connotations of the word **inerrant**.”<sup>107</sup>

Likewise, it should be understood that “scriptural inerrancy does not imply that evangelical orthodoxy follows as a nec-

<sup>107</sup>Kenneth S. Kantzer, “Evangelicals and the Doctrine of Inerrancy” in *The Foundations of Biblical Authority*, ed. James M. Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 155.

essary consequence of accepting of this doctrine.”<sup>108</sup> Right interpretation and spiritual commitment must follow.

#### PROPOSITIONAL REVELATION

A major philosophical issue related to the question of infallibility and inerrancy concerns whether God can reveal himself truly. Truth refers here to propositional statements, or assertions, that accurately correspond to the object or objects they refer to. Can God reveal truth about himself? Is He able to reveal propositionally something of who He actually is to humanity? If the answer is yes, but what He reveals is only generally trustworthy, then God’s revelation contains error. If God has revealed himself through a mixture of truth and error, either He must have done so deliberately or He could not help doing so.

It is not likely that God deliberately revealed error. No firm evidence of any such revealed error is indicated in the Bible. Also, deliberately revealed error is antithetical to God’s nature as the God of truth. God always acts according to His nature.

To say that God could not keep from revealing error in His self-disclosure calls into question both His omniscience and His omnipotence. To say what God can or cannot do, apart from divine revelation, is presumptuous. His revelation of **himself truly** is not one of the things the Bible says God cannot do (not an inability of power but of moral nature). If God, who created all things including the human mind, can communicate one truth to the human person, then there is no logical reason He cannot communicate any and all truth He desires.

After acknowledging that God is able to reveal himself truly, we may ask, Did He also cause His revelation to be **inscripturated** truly? To deny this reduces one to agnosticism or skepticism with regard to any absolute truth, awaiting empirical verification of each statement of Scripture (assuming all matters are capable of empirical verification). Instead, if one is to have confidence in the Bible as the Word of God, the witness of Scripture to itself must be taken as normative in defining the true doctrine of inspiration. As examined earlier in this chapter, Jesus and the biblical writers with one

<sup>108</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 4, 204. Note that scientific language was not invented until modern times. The Bible uses everyday language; for example, it speaks of a sunset just like we do. However, when the Bible gives specific teachings in the area of science or history we hold that these teachings are inerrant.

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voice proclaim that God's revelation of truth has inerrantly been inscripturated. It cannot be broken and will not pass away!

## PRESERVATION OF THE TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE

Has God caused His revelation to be purely preserved? If "purely preserved" means "inerrantly preserved," the answer is no. As mentioned above, inerrancy adheres directly to the autographs only. In the many biblical manuscripts that have been preserved, there are thousands of variations. Most of these are so minor they are negligible (e.g., spelling, grammar, transposition of words, etc.). Not a single doctrine is based on a questionable manuscript reading.

If, however, "purely preserved" means the teachings of Scripture have been "uncorruptedly preserved," the answer is a resounding yes. Today the Church has several different modern versions of the Bible based on the many extant Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. These versions carefully compare the ancient manuscripts and early versions of the Bible. They provide the reader with the Scriptures in an up-to-date vocabulary and style while retaining the accuracy of meaning. These versions, in turn, have been translated into hundreds of languages.

Although today's Bibles are far removed from the autographs in time, they are not far removed in accuracy. A chain of witnesses exists going back to those who claim they saw the autographs (e.g., Polycarp, Clement of Rome). They had both the motive and opportunity to assure the reliability of copies made from the originals. There was a desire among believers to preserve the teachings of Scripture, and care went into its transmission from one generation to another. It is possible by the science of textual criticism to arrive at a biblical text that is an accurate representation of the autographs. Then, to the degree that we approximate the content and God's intended meaning of the Scripture through textual criticism, exegesis, and interpretation—to that degree we can say we are proclaiming the Word of God.

This can be true only if we can be sure the autographs were the Word of God, infallibly inscripturated by supernatural inspiration. Inerrancy is essential somewhere along the line if we are to know what is true. The value of **inerrant** autographs is that we are certain that what men wrote down was exactly what God wanted recorded. The autographs de-

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rive their value from the fact that, in essence, they are the Word of God rather than merely the words of human writers.

The apographs, on the other hand, derive their value from the fact that they so closely represent the autographs. The copies, versions, and translations cannot be said to have been inspired in their production, but surely they must in some derivative, mediate sense retain the quality of inspiration that was inherent in the autographs. Otherwise they would not be authoritative. The **act** of inspiration happened only once; the **quality** of inspiration was retained in the apographs. The original act of inspiration produced an inspired Word in **both** the autographs and the apographs.

## THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

All religious literature, even the most helpful and widely read, is not considered Scripture. This not only is true today, but also was true in the days of the writing of the Old and New Testaments. The Apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, and other religious writings were recognized as having varying degrees of value, but were not considered worthy to be called the Word of God. Only the sixty-six books contained in the Bible are referred to as the canon of **Scripture**.<sup>109</sup>

The term "canon" comes from the Greek *kanōn*, which denoted a carpenter's rule or some similar measuring rod. In the Greek world, canon came to mean "a standard or norm by which all things are judged or **evaluated**."<sup>110</sup> Canons developed for architecture, sculpture, literature, philosophy, and so forth. Christians began to use the term theologically to designate those writings that had met the standard to be considered holy Scripture. These canonical books alone are regarded as the authoritative and infallible revelation from God.

It is understandable that the Jewish and Christian believers would want to have an established canon as other fields of

<sup>109</sup>Roman Catholics and some other groups include, in addition, fourteen books of the Old Testament Apocrypha. These books were included in the LXX version. The Early Church as a whole considered them to be worth reading but not inspired. Some of the books, such as First Maccabees, contain good history. Others contain errors and doctrines contrary to the rest of the Bible. Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, did not consider them on the same level as the sixty-six books of the canon. All the Reformers rejected them.

<sup>110</sup>Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 40.

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learning had. Religious persecution, geographical expansion, and increasing circulation of a wide range of religious writings added to the impetus to gather such a canon. Tradition suggests that Ezra was largely responsible for gathering the Jewish sacred writings into a recognized canon. However, the recognition of a closed Old Testament canon is usually dated from a supposed Council of Jamnia about A.D. 90–100.<sup>111</sup> The oldest surviving Christian list of the Old Testament canon comes from about A.D. 170, compiled by Melito, bishop of Sardis.<sup>112</sup> In the early centuries of Christianity various canons of Scripture were proposed, from that of the heretic Marcion in 140 to the Muratorian Canon of 180 to the first complete New Testament Canon of Athanasius in 367. The New Testament canon as we now have it was officially recognized at the Third Council of Carthage in 397 and by the Eastern Church by 500.<sup>113</sup>

The establishment of the biblical canon was not the decision of the writers or religious leaders or a church council, however. Rather, the process of these particular books' being accepted as Scripture was the Holy Spirit's providential influence on the people of God. The canon was formed by consensus rather than decree. The Church did not decide which books should be in the biblical canon, but simply acknowledged those already recognized by God's people as His Word. Clearly, the Church was not the authority; it saw the authority in the inspired Word.

Various guiding principles, or criteria, for canonical writings, however, have been suggested. They include **apostolicity**, universality, church use, survivability, authority, age, content, authorship, authenticity, and dynamic qualities. Of primary concern was whether the writing was regarded as inspired. Only those writings breathed out by God fit the measure of the authoritative Word of God.

The biblical canon is closed. God's infallible self-revelation has been recorded. Today He continues to speak in and

<sup>111</sup>The Jewish Sanhedrin moved to Jamnia (Jabneel, Jabneh), south southwest of Jerusalem, after Jerusalem was destroyed. Little evidence exists of any official discussion or any "Council of Jamnia." However, during this period there was a general consensus, probably reached by common usage. See William LaSor, David Hubbard, Frederic Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 22.

<sup>112</sup>F. F. Bruce, "Tradition and the Canon of Scripture" in *The Authoritative Word*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 65.

<sup>113</sup>Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 60–61.

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through that Word. Just as God revealed himself and inspired writers to record that revelation, He preserved those inspired writings and guided His people in the selection of them to ensure His truth would be known. Other writings are not to be added to, nor any writings taken from, the canonical Scriptures. The canon contains the historical roots of the Christian Church, and "the canon cannot be remade for the simple reason that history cannot be remade."<sup>14</sup>

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE WORD

## INSPIRATION

The Scriptures were breathed out by God as the Holy Spirit inspired men to write in behalf of God. Because of His initiation and superintendence, the writers' words were, in truth, the Word of God. At least in some instances the biblical writers were aware that their message was not merely human wisdom, but "in words taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13).

Others were also aware of the Spirit-inspired quality of the writings of Scripture, as is shown by expressions such as the following: "David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared ..." (Mark 12:36); "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me" (2 Sam. 23:2); "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David" (Acts 1:16); "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet. ..." (Acts 28:25); "So, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear his voice ...'" (Heb. 3:7); "The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: 'This is the covenant I will make'" (Heb. 10: 15-16). Thus whoever the writers were—whether Moses, David, Luke, Paul, or unknown (to us)—they wrote "as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:2 1).

Some have wrongly viewed this inspiration of the Spirit to be a mechanical dictation of Scripture, appealing to such a notable as John Calvin. Several times Calvin does use the term "dictation" in conjunction with the Spirit's inspiration. For example, "Whoever is the penman of the Psalm, the Holy Spirit seems by his mouth to have dictated a common form

<sup>14</sup>Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 275.

of prayer for the Church in her **affliction**.”<sup>115</sup> However, Calvin uses the term “dictation” in a less strict sense than is currently understood by the dictation view of inspiration. He was aware of the contribution of the human authors in areas such as style of writing. Note his observation of Ezekiel’s style:

Ezekiel is verbose in this narration. But in the beginning of the book we said, that because the teacher was sent to men very slow and stupid, he therefore used a rough style. ...[H]e had acquired it partly from the region in which he dwelt.”<sup>116</sup>

Calvin did believe, therefore, that God prepared the biblical writers through various experiences of life and that the Holy Spirit spoke according to the style of the writer needed for a particular occasion. Whether to reach the educated or uneducated, “the Holy Spirit so tempers his style as that the sublimity of the truths which he teaches is not hidden.”<sup>117</sup>

The Holy Spirit, using the personalities, experiences, abilities, and styles of the human authors, superintended their writings to ensure that God’s message was accurately and fully communicated. As Jesus had promised, the Spirit led them into truth, brought to them remembrances, and taught them all that was needed for God’s divine revelation (John 14 through 16).

#### REGENERATION

The work of the Holy Spirit is complementary to the work of Christ in regeneration. Christ died on the cross to make it possible for the sinner to be made alive again to God. Through spiritual rebirth one enters the kingdom of God (John 3:3). The Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ’s salvation to the heart of the individual. He works in the human heart to convict of sin and to produce faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice. This faith is responsible for regeneration through union with Christ.

This regenerating faith produced by the Holy Spirit, however, should not be considered abstractly. It does not exist in a vacuum, but arises in relation to the Word of God. Faith

<sup>115</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 2, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 205.

<sup>116</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Ezekiel*, vol. 1, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 392.

<sup>117</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms*, 229.

comes from hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10: 17). Not only was the Holy Spirit responsible for recording the message of salvation found in the Scriptures, but He also **witnesses** to the truth of the Scriptures. If God has spoken to humankind in the Bible, then the Holy Spirit must convince persons of that fact. The Spirit convinces not just of a general truthfulness of Scripture, but of a powerfully personal application of that truth (John 16:8–11). Christ as personal Savior is the object of the faith produced in the heart by the Spirit. This faith is **inseparably** linked to God’s promises of grace found throughout the Bible. “The Spirit and the Word are both needed. The Spirit takes the Word and applies it to the heart to bring repentance and faith, and through this, life.”<sup>118</sup> For this reason the Bible speaks of regeneration both in terms of being “born of the Spirit” and of being “born again ... through **the** living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23; see also John 3:5).

#### ILLUMINATION

The doctrine of the **illumination** of the Spirit involves the Holy Spirit’s work in a person’s acceptance, understanding, and appropriation of the Word of God. Earlier we considered a number of internal and external evidences for the Bible’s being the Word of God. However, more powerful and more convincing than all of them is the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. **While** the evidences are important and the Spirit may use them, ultimately it is the Spirit’s authoritative voice to the human heart that brings the conviction that indeed Scripture is the Word of God.<sup>119</sup>

Without the Spirit, humankind neither accepts nor understands the truths that come from the Spirit of God. The rejection of God’s truth by unbelievers is linked to their lack of spiritual understanding. The things of God are seen as foolishness by them (1 Cor. 1:22–23; 2:14). Jesus described unbelievers as those who hear but do not understand (Matt. 13:13–15). Through sin “their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts darkened” (Rom. 1:21). “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel” (2 Cor. 4:4). Their only hope for spiritual understanding (i.e., that they may perceive God’s truth) is the illumination of the Spirit (Eph. 1:18; 1 John 5:20).

<sup>118</sup>Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), 115.

<sup>119</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, I, vii, 4, 5.



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This initial spiritual perception results in regeneration but also opens the door to a new life of growing in the knowledge of God.

Although the promises of John 14 through 16 concerning the Spirit's guidance and teaching have special reference to the disciples of Jesus who would be used to write the New Testament Scriptures, there is a continuing sense in which this ministry of the Spirit relates to all believers. "The same Teacher also continues His teaching work in us, not by bringing new revelation, but by bringing new understanding, new comprehension, new illumination. But He does more than show us the truth. He brings us into the truth, helping us put it into **action**."<sup>120</sup>

It is important to keep the written Word of God and the illumination of the Spirit together: What the Spirit illumines is the truth of God's Word, not some mystical content hidden behind that revelation. The human mind is not bypassed but quickened as the Holy Spirit elucidates the truth. "Revelation is derived from the Bible, not from experience, nor from the Spirit as a second source alongside and independent of **Scripture**."<sup>121</sup> Even the gifts of utterance given by the Holy Spirit are in no way equal to the Scriptures and are to be judged by the Scriptures (1 Cor. 12: 10; 14:29; 1 John 4:1). The Holy Spirit neither alters nor expands the truth of God's revelation given in Scripture. The Scriptures serve as the necessary and only objective standard through which the Holy Spirit's voice continues to be heard.

Illumination by the Spirit is not intended to be a shortcut to biblical knowledge or a replacement for sincere study of God's Word. Rather, as one studies the Scriptures the Holy Spirit gives spiritual understanding, which includes both belief and persuasion. "Philological and exegetical research is not rendered useless by His operation, for it is in the heart of the interpreter himself that He works, creating that inner receptivity by which the Word of God is really 'heard.'"<sup>122</sup> Causing the Word to be heard by the heart as well as by the head, the Spirit brings about a conviction concerning the truth that results in an eager appropriation (Rom. 10: 17; Eph. 3:19; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:13).

Neoorthodoxy tends to confuse inspiration and illumina-

<sup>120</sup>Horton, *What the Bible Says*, 12 1.

<sup>121</sup>Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 4, 284.

<sup>122</sup>Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 2 15.

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tion by viewing the Scriptures as "becoming" the Word of God when the Holy Spirit confronts a person through those human writings. According to neoorthodoxy, Scripture is **revelation** only when and where the Spirit speaks existentially. The biblical text has no definite objective meaning. "[S]ince there are no revealed truths, only truths of revelation, how one person interprets an encounter with God may be **different** from another person's **understanding**."<sup>123</sup>

**Evangelicals**, however, view Scripture as the objective written Word of God inspired by the Spirit at the time of its writing. True communication about God is present in propositional form whether or not one recognizes, rejects, or embraces that truth. The authority of Scripture is intrinsic due to inspiration and is not dependent on illumination. It is distinct from and antecedent to the testimony of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit illumines what He has already inspired and His illumination adheres only to that written Word.

## THE WRITTEN WORD AND THE LIVING WORD

God's revelation of himself is centered on Jesus Christ. He is the **Logos** of God. He is the Living Word, the Word incarnate, revealing the eternal God in human terms. The title **Logos** is unique to the Johannine writings of Scripture, although the term's use was significant in Greek philosophy of the day. Some have tried to connect John's usage to that of the Stoics or early **Gnostics**, or to the writings of **Philo**. More recent scholarship suggests John was primarily influenced by his Old Testament and Christian background. However, he was probably aware of the wider connotations of the term and may have intentionally used it for the purpose of conveying additional, unique meaning.<sup>124</sup>

The **Logos** is identified with both God's creative Word and His authoritative Word (law for **all** humankind). John staggers the imagination as he introduces the eternal **Logos**, the Creator of all things, very God himself, as the Word made flesh to dwell among His creation (John 1:1-3,14). "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has **made him known**" (John 1: 18). This Living Word has been seen, heard, touched, and now proclaimed

<sup>123</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 253.

<sup>124</sup>Ruth B. Edwards, "Word" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans 1915), 3105.

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through the written Word ( **1 John 1:1-3**). **The Bible ends with the living *Logos* of God, faithful and true, poised on heaven's balcony, ready to return as Rings of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:1 1-16).**

God's highest revelation is in His Son. For many centuries through the words of the Old Testament writers, God was progressively making himself known. Types, figures, and shadows gradually unfolded His plan for lost humanity's **redemption** (Col. 2:17). Then in the fullness of time God sent His Son to more perfectly reveal God and to execute that gracious plan through His death on the Cross ( 1 Cor. 1 :17-25; Gal. 4:4). **All Scripture revelation prior to and subsequent to Christ's incarnation center on Him. The many sources and means of previous revelation pointed to and foreshadowed His coming. All subsequent revelation magnify and explain why He came. God's revelation of himself began as cryptic and small, progressed through time, and climaxed in the incarnation of His Son. Jesus is the fullest revelation of God. All the inspired writings that follow do not add any greater revelation, but amplify the greatness of His appearance. "[The Spirit] will not speak on his own. ... He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you" (John 16: 13-14).**

In the person of Jesus Christ, the source and content of revelation coincide. He was not just a channel of God's revelation, as were the prophets and apostles. He himself is the "radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb. 1:3). He is "the way and the truth and the life"; to know Him is to know the Father as well (John 14:6-7). The prophets said, "The Word of the Lord came unto me," but Jesus said, "I say unto you"! Jesus reversed the use of the "amen," beginning His statements with " 'Truly, truly, I say to you' " (John 3:3, NASB). By virtue of **His** saying it, truth was immediately and unquestionably declared.

Christ is the key that unlocks the meaning of the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27; John 5:39-40; Acts 17:2-3; 28:23; 2 Tim. 3: 15). They testify of Him and lead to the salvation He died to provide. The Scriptures' focus on Christ, however, does not warrant reckless abandonment of the biblical text in areas that seem to be devoid of overt Christological information. Clark H. Pinnock wisely reminds us that "Christ is the **hermeneutical *Guide*** to the meaning of Scripture, not its critical **scalpel**."<sup>125</sup> Christ's own attitude toward the whole of Scrip-

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ture was one of total trust and full acceptance. Special revelation in Christ and in the Scriptures is consistent, **concurrent**, and **conclusive**. One finds Christ through the Scriptures and through the Scriptures finds Christ. "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:3 1).

## STUDY QUESTIONS

**1.** Animism usually involves the worship of aspects of nature. Reflect on how this would relate to general revelation. Could general revelation serve as a bridge to witnessing to animists? How?

**2.** The Bible **affirms** the **value** of general revelation. Yet sin has impacted general revelation in a negative way. How is general revelation to be understood prior to the fall of man, presently to sinful man, and presently to redeemed man?

**3.** The doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture does not require that the authors only mechanically transcribed what God wanted communicated. The writers retained their own particular literary style and form. Select two biblical authors and note some of their writing characteristics.

**4.** Both biblical prophecy and biblical archaeology have been appealed to as areas of evidence for the uniqueness of the Bible. Compile a list of biblical prophecies and their fulfillment and a list of archaeological discoveries that support biblical content.

**5.** The doctrine of biblical inerrancy refers to the biblical autographs. Since we do not have any of the autographs, how does inerrancy relate to the versions and translations of the Bible we use today?

**6.** Most non-Christian religions have their own holy book(s). In what ways is the Bible unique among such writings?

**7.** Choose two Scripture passages that seem to be contradictory or a passage that seems to contain an error. Suggest a possible solution.

**8.** How do spiritual gifts such as prophecy, tongues, and interpretation relate to the concept of a closed canon of Scripture?

<sup>125</sup>Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 37.

***CHAPTER FOUR***

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# ***The One True God***

***Russell E. Joyner***

Many systematic theologies of the past have succeeded in classifying the moral attributes of God and the nature of His being. However, God did not reveal himself in all the variety of biblical manifestations simply to give us theoretical knowledge about himself. Instead, we find God's self-disclosure is coupled with personal challenge, confrontation, and the opportunity to respond. This is evident when the Lord meets with Adam, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, Mary, Peter, Nathaniel, and Martha. Along with these witnesses and many others (see Heb. 12:1), we can testify that we study to know Him, not just to know about Him. "Shout for joy to the **LORD**, all the earth. Worship the **LORD** with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the **LORD** is God" (Ps. 100: 1–2). Every Scripture passage that we examine should be studied with a heart toward **worship**, service, and obedience.

Our understanding of God must not be based on presumptions about Him or on what we want God to be like. Instead we must believe in the God who is and who has chosen to reveal himself to us in Scripture. Human beings tend to create fictitious gods that are easy to believe in, gods that conform to their own life-style and sinful nature (Rom. 1:21–25). This is one of the marks of false religion. Some Christians even fall into the trap of ignoring the self-revelation of God and begin to develop a concept of God that is more in line with their personal whims than with the Bible. The Bible is our true source. It lets us know that God exists and what He is like.

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## GOD'S EXISTENCE

The Bible does not attempt to prove God's existence.<sup>1</sup> Instead, it opens with His existence as a primary assumption: "In the beginning God" (Gen. 1: 1). God is! He is the starting point. Throughout the Bible there is substantial evidence for His existence. While "the fool says in his heart, 'There is no God,' . . . The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Pss. 14:1; 19: 1). God has made himself known through His creative and sustaining actions; giving life, breath (Acts 17:24–28), food, and joy (Acts 14: 17). God accompanies those actions with words to interpret their meaning and significance, providing a record that explains His presence and purpose. God also reveals His existence by speaking and acting through prophets, priests, kings, and faithful servants. Ultimately, God has revealed himself clearly to us through His Son and through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

For those of us who believe that God has revealed himself in Scripture, our descriptions of the one true Deity are based on His self-disclosure. Yet we live in a world that generally does not share this view of the Bible as a primary source. Many people rely instead on human ingenuity and perception to arrive at a depiction of the divine. For us to follow the steps of the apostle Paul in leading them out of the darkness into the light, we need to be aware of the general categories of those human perceptions.

In the secular understanding of history, science, and religion, the theory of evolution has been accepted by many as reliable fact. According to that theory, as human beings evolved, so did their religious beliefs and expressions.\* Religion is presented as a movement from **simple** to more complex practices and creeds. Followers of this scheme of the evolutionary theory say religion begins at the level of animism, in which natural objects are considered to be indwelt by supernatural powers or disembodied spirits. These spirits impact human life according to their own devious pleasure.

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<sup>1</sup>Philosophers have attempted to do so. For a brief survey of the so-called rational proofs (ontological, cosmological, teleological, moral, and ethnological) for the existence of God, see L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1941), 26–28. Some consider these as pointers rather than proofs.

<sup>2</sup>This theory is expressed with numerous variations and became a part of the antsupernatural philosophies and theologies of Wellhausen, Freud, and Nietzsche, as well as those of both Nazis and Communists.

Animism **evolves into** simple polytheism, in which certain of the supernatural powers are perceived as deities. The next step, according to evolutionists, is henotheism, as one of the deities achieves supremacy over all the other spirits and is worshiped in preference to them. Monolatry follows when the people choose to worship only one of the gods, though not denying the existence of the others.

The logical conclusion of the theory is monotheism, which occurs only as the people evolve to the point of denying the existence of all other gods and worshiping only one deity. The research of anthropologists and missiologists in this century has shown clearly that this theory is not validated by the facts of history or by the careful study of contemporary "primitive" **cultures**.<sup>3</sup> When human beings shape a belief system according to their own design, it does not develop in the direction of monotheism, but rather toward more gods and more animism.\* The tendency is toward syncretism, adding newly discovered deities to the set already worshiped.

In contrast to evolution is revelation. We serve a God who both acts and speaks. Monotheism is not the result of human evolutionary genius, but of divine self-disclosure. This divine self-disclosure is progressive in nature as God has continued to reveal more of himself throughout the **Bible**.<sup>5</sup> By the time of the first post-Resurrection Pentecost we learn that God does indeed manifest himself to His people in three distinct **Persons**.<sup>6</sup> But in Old Testament times it was necessary to establish the fact that there is one true God in contrast to the many gods served by Israel's neighbors in Canaan, Egypt, and Mesopotamia.

Through Moses, the teaching was asserted, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4).<sup>7</sup> **The** Lord's existence and continuing activity were not dependent on His relationship with any other god or creature. Instead, our God

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<sup>3</sup>See Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1961), 52–55.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Rom. 1:21–23, 25. Egyptian records confirm this. See Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*; trans. by John Baines (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 98–99, 171. When the Aryans came to India they were already polytheists, but they worshiped only a few gods. Today in India many gods are worshiped and there is also more animism.

<sup>5</sup>See chap. 3, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup>See chap. 5 on the Trinity.

<sup>7</sup>"One" is the Heb. *'echad*, which can mean a compound or complex unity.

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could simply “be,” while choosing to call human beings to His side (not because He needed them, but because they needed Him).

## GOD’S CONSTITUTIONAL ATTRIBUTES

“ ‘He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else’ ” (Acts 17:25). **God** is self-existent in the sense that He does not look to any other source for His meaning and being. His very name, Yahweh, is a statement that “He is and will continue to be? God is not dependent on anyone to counsel or teach Him: “Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?” (Isa. 40:14). **The** Lord has not needed any other being to assist Him in creation and providence (Isa. 44:24). God wills to impart life to His people, and He stands apart as independent from all others. “ ‘The Father has life in himself’ ” (John 5:26). No created being can make that claim, so we creatures are left to declare in our worship: “ ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being’ ” (Rev. 4:11).

## SPIRIT

Jesus encountered a woman of **Samaria** at Jacob’s well one day. Samaritans were regarded by first-century Jews as an aberrant cult, to be avoided. The Samaritans had been forced to give up idolatry, but they had modified the Pentateuch to limit the place of worship to Mount Gerizim, and they rejected the rest of the Old Testament. Jesus exposed the error of their worldview by declaring, “ ‘God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth’ ” (John 4:24). This worship would not be restricted by any physical site, since that reflects a false concept of the very nature of God. Worship must be in keeping with the spiritual nature of God.

The Bible does not define “spirit” for us, but it does offer descriptions. God as spirit is immortal, invisible, and eternal, worthy of our honor and glory forever ( 1 Tim. 1: 17). As spirit, He lives in light that humans are unable to approach: “Whom no one has seen or can see” ( 1 Tim. 6: 16). His spiritual nature is difficult for us to understand because we have not yet seen God as He is, and apart from faith we are unable to understand

\*See the discussion on Yahweh, p. 134.

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that which we have not experienced. Our sensory perception does not offer any assistance in discerning God’s spiritual nature. God is not shackled by the bonds of physical matter. We worship One who is quite different from us, yet He desires to put within us the Holy Spirit as a foretaste of that day when we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). Then we shall be able to approach the light, for we shall cast off mortality and take on glorified immortality ( 1 Cor. 15:51-54).

## KNOWABLE

“No one has ever seen God” (John 1: 18). The Almighty God cannot be fully comprehended by humanity (Job 11:7), yet He has shown himself at different times and in various ways, indicating that it is His will for us to know Him and to be in right relationship with Him (John 1:18; 5:20; 17:3; Acts 14: 17; Rom. 1: 18-20). This does not mean, however, that we can completely and exhaustively perceive all God’s character and nature (Rom. 1:18–20; 2: 14–15). As God reveals, He also conceals: “Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel” (Isa. 45:15).

Rather than detracting from His attributes, this concealing of himself is a confessional declaration of our limits and of God’s infinitude. Because God determined to speak through His Son (Heb. 1:2) and to have His fullness dwell within His Son (Col. 1:19), we can expect to find the most focused manifestation of God’s character in Jesus. Not only does Jesus make the Father known, He also reveals the meaning and significance of the **Father**.<sup>9</sup>

By means of numerous invitations God expresses His will that we know Him: “ ‘Be still, and know that I am God’ ” (Ps. 46:10). When the Hebrews submitted to the Lord, He promised that divine manifestations would show that He was their God and they were His people. “ ‘Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians’ ” (Exod. 6:7). The conquest of the Promised Land was also significant evidence of both the fact and knowability of the only true and living God (Josh. 3:10). The Canaanites and others who were to suffer God’s divine judgment would be made to know that God existed and that He stood by Israel (1 Sam. 17:46; 1 Rings 20:28).

<sup>9</sup>John 1: 18, “*exēgēsato*.” Since no one has seen, or can fully comprehend, the Father, the *Logos* makes known, or “exegetes,” Him for us, explaining by word and deed. See chap. 9, pp. 299–301.

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Those who yielded to the Lord, however, could go beyond a mere knowledge of His existence to a knowledge of His person and purpose (1 Kings 18:37). One of the Old Testament benefits of being in a covenant relationship with God was that He would continue to reveal himself to those who obeyed the stipulations of that covenant (Ezek. 20:20; 28:26; 34:30; 39:22,28; Joel 2:27; 3:17).

Humans have searched for knowledge of the Deity since the beginning. Occurring in one of the earliest periods of biblical history, Zophar asked Job whether the search would yield any results: “‘Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?’” (Job 11:7). Elihu added, “‘How great is God-beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out’” (Job 36:26). Whatever knowledge we have of God is because He has chosen to disclose himself to us. But even the admittedly limited knowledge we now have is glorious to behold and is a sufficient ground for our faith.

## ETERNAL

We measure our existence by time: past, present, future. God is not limited by time, yet He has chosen to reveal himself to us within our framework of reference, so that we might see Him at work before and behind us. The terms “eternal,” “everlasting,” and “forever” are often used by English Bible translators to capture the Hebrew and Greek phrases that bring God into our perspective.<sup>10</sup> He existed before creation: “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Ps. 90:2).

We must admit that because we experience time as a measurement with limitations, a full comprehension of eternity is beyond us. But we can meditate on the enduring and timeless aspect of God, which will lead us to worship Him as a personal Lord who has bridged a great gap between His infinite, unlimited vitality and our finite, limited mortality. “He who lives forever, whose name is holy [says]: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite’” (Isa. 57:15).

Therefore, completely apart from trying to understand the relation of time and eternity, we can confess: “Now to the

<sup>10</sup>Deut. 33:27, “eternal God”; Ps. 102:12, “enthroned forever”; v. 27, “your years will never end.”

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King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim. 1: 17; cf. Num. 23: 19; Pss. 33:11; 102:27; Isa. 57:15).

## OMNIPOTENT

An ancient philosophical dilemma asks whether God is able to create a rock that is too large for Him to move. If He is not able to move it, then He is not all-powerful. If He is not able to create one that large, then that proves He is not all-powerful. This logical fallacy simply plays with words and overlooks the fact that God's power is intertwined with His purposes.

The more honest question would be, Is God powerful enough to do **anything** that He clearly intends to do and that **fulfills** His divine purpose? In the context of His purpose God shows that He is indeed able to accomplish whatever He wishes: “For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?” (Isa. 14:27). The unlimited power and might of the one true God cannot be withstood, thwarted, or turned back by humans (2 Chron. 20:6; Ps. 147:5; Isa. 43:13; Dan. 4:35).

God has shown **that** His primary concern is not with the size and weight of rocks (though He can make them give water [Exod. 17:6] or praise [Luke 19:40]), but with calling, shaping, and **transforming** a people for himself. This is seen in His bringing breath and life from the womb of Sarah when she was old-as God **said**, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Gen. 18:14; cf. Jer. 32:17)—**and** from the womb of the young virgin, Mary (Matt. 1:20–25). God's highest purpose was found in bringing **life** from a tomb near Jerusalem as a demonstration of “his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is **like** the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he **raised** him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 1:19–20).

Jesus' disciples pondered the impossibility of sending a camel through the eye of a literal sewing needle (Mark 10:25–27).<sup>1</sup> The real lesson here is that it is not possible for people to save themselves. However, that is not only possible for God, but also within His divine purpose. Therefore, the work of salvation is the exclusive domain of the Lord, who is al-

<sup>1</sup>Gk. *rhaphidos*. Luke 18:25 uses the more classical *belonēs*, usually used of a surgeon's needle.

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mighty. We can exalt Him, not just because He is omnipotent and His power is greater than that of any other, but because His purposes are great and He applies His great power to accomplish His will.

## OMNIPRESENT

The nations that surrounded ancient Israel served regional or national gods who were limited in their impact by locale and ritual. For the most part, these regional deities were considered by their devotees to have power only within the domain of the people who made offerings to them. Although the Lord did present himself to Israel as one who could focus His presence in the Holy of **Holies** of the tabernacle and temple, this was His concession to the limitations of human understanding. Solomon recognized this when he said, “Will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27).

We humans are presently limited to existence within the physical dimensions of this universe. There is absolutely nowhere that we can go to be out of the presence of God: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (Ps. 139:7–10; cf. Jer. 23:23–24). The spiritual nature of God allows Him to be omnipresent and yet very near to us (Acts 17:27–28).

## OMNISCIENT

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4: 13). God has the ability to know our thoughts and our intentions (Ps. 139:1–4), and He does not grow tired or weary in His activity of discerning them (Isa. 40:28). God’s knowledge is not limited by our understanding of future time, since He can know the end of something from its very beginning (Isa. 46: 10).

God’s knowledge and wisdom are beyond our ability to penetrate (Rom. 11:33). That makes it **difficult** for us to fully comprehend how God has foreknowledge of events that are conditional upon our free will. This is one of those areas that place us in a healthy tension (not contradiction but paradox);

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Scripture does not give enough information to adequately resolve the tension. It does, however, give us what we **need**—along with the help of the Holy Spirit—to make decisions that will please God.

## WISE

In the ancient world, the concept of wisdom tended to belong to the realm of theory and debate. The Bible, however, presents wisdom in the realm of the practical, and again our model for this kind of wisdom is God. “Wisdom” (Heb. *chokhmab*) is the joining of the knowledge of truth with experience in life. Knowledge by **itself** may fill the head with facts without an understanding of their significance or application. Wisdom gives direction and meaning.

God’s knowledge gives Him insight into all that is and can be. In view of the fact that God is self-existent, He has experience that we cannot even imagine and His understanding is unlimited (Ps. 147:5). He applies His knowledge wisely. All the works of His hands are made in His great wisdom (Ps. 104:24), allowing **Him** to set monarchs in position or to change the times and seasons as He wisely sees fit (Dan. 2:21).

God desires for us to partake of His wisdom and understanding so that we may know His plans for us and live in the center of His will (Col. 2:2–3).

## GOD’S MORAL ATTRIBUTES

## FAITHFUL

The religions of the ancient Near East were devoted to fickle, capricious deities. The grand exception to this was the God of Israel. He is dependable in His nature and actions. The Hebrew word *‘amen*, “truly,” is derived from one of the most outstanding Hebrew descriptions of God’s character, reflecting His certainty and dependability: “I will exalt you and praise your name, for in **perfect faithfulness** [*‘emunab* *‘omen*, literally ‘faithfulness of reliability’] you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago” (Isa. 25: 1).

While we use “amen” to express our assurance of God’s ability to answer prayer, the biblical occurrences of the *‘amen* family of words include an even broader range of manifestations of God’s power and faithfulness. Abraham’s chief servant attributed his successful search for a bride for young Isaac to the faithful nature of Yahweh (Gen. 24:27). The words “truth” and “faithfulness” (*‘emeth* and *‘emunab*)

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are, appropriately, extensions of the one Hebrew concept joined together in the nature of God.

The Lord evinces His faithfulness through keeping His promises: “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands” (Deut. 7:9). Joshua exclaimed at the end of his life that the Lord God had never failed him in even one promise (Josh. 23: 14). The Psalmist confessed, “You established your faithfulness in heaven itself” (Ps. 89:2).

God shows himself to be constant in His intention to have fellowship with us, guiding and protecting us. Even the sin and wickedness of this world will not claim us if we submit to Him: “Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22–23).

Because God is faithful, it would be unheard of for Him to abandon His children when they suffer temptation or trial (1 Cor. 10: 13). “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Num. 23: 19). God remains stable in His nature, while exhibiting flexibility in His actions.<sup>12</sup> When God makes a covenant with people, His vow is a sufficient seal and profession of the unchanging nature of His person and purposes: “Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath” (Heb. 6: 17). If God were ever to stop upholding His promises, then He would be repudiating His own character.

Paul contrasts the human and the divine natures when He writes of the glory that follows the suffering of Christ: “If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). God’s dependability is absolute because of what He is: faithful and true (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 89:8; 1 Thess. 5:23–24; Heb. 10:23; 1 John 1:9).

## TRUTHFUL

“God is not a man, that he should lie” (Num. 23:19). The veracity of God is in contrast to the dishonesty of humans, but not just in relative measure. God is perfectly faithful to His word and His way (Pss. 33:4; 119: 15 1 ), and His integrity is a permanent character trait that He exhibits (Ps. 119:160).

<sup>12</sup>Often classified as immutability; cf. Pss. 33:11; 102:27; James 1:17.

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This stable and enduring truthfulness of the Lord is the vehicle through which we are sanctified, because the truth proclaimed has become truth incarnate: “ ‘Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth’ ” (John 17:17). Our hope rests directly on the assurance that everything God has revealed to us is true, and all that He has done so far to fulfill His word gives us assurance that He will bring to completion what He has begun (John 14:6; Titus 1:1).

## GOOD

God is, by His very nature, inclined to act with great generosity toward His creation. During the days of creation the Lord periodically examined His work and declared that it was good, in the sense of being pleasing and well-suited for His purposes (Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31). The same adjective is used to describe God’s moral character: “The LORD is good and his love endures forever” (Ps. 100:5). In this context, the expression carries the original idea of pleasing or fully suitable, but goes beyond to illustrate for us the grace that is essential to God’s nature: “The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made” (Ps. 145:8–9; see also Lam. 3:25). This facet of His nature is manifested in His willingness to provide our needs, whether they are material (rain and crops, Acts 14: 17) or spiritual (joy, Acts 14: 17; wisdom, James 1:5). This aspect is also in contrast to ancient beliefs, wherein all the other gods were unpredictable, vicious, and anything but good.

We can model ourselves after our generous and compassionate God, for “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).

## PATIENT

In a world full of retaliatory actions, often too hastily decided upon, our “LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion” (Num. 14:18). This “slowness” toward anger allows a window of opportunity for God to show compassion and grace (Ps. 86:15). The Lord’s patience is for our benefit, so that we will realize that it should lead us to repentance (Rom. 2:4; 9:22–23).

We live in the tension of desiring Jesus to fulfill His promises by returning, yet wanting Him to wait until more people accept Him as Savior and Lord: “The Lord is not slow in



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keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

The Lord will punish the guilty for sin, yet for the present He will utilize His own standard of "slowness," since His patience means salvation (2 Pet. 3: 15).

**LOVE**

Many of us began our early study of the Bible with memorization of John 3:16. As young Christians we recited it with vigor and enthusiasm, often with added emphasis upon " 'For God so loved the world.' " After further consideration, we find that the love of God in that passage is not being described as a quantity, but rather as a quality. It is not that God loved us so much that it motivated Him to give, but that He loved in such a sacrificial manner that He gave.<sup>13</sup>

God has revealed himself as a God who expresses a particular kind of love, a love that is displayed by sacrificial giving. As John defines it: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" ( 1 John 4:10).

God also shows His love by providing rest and protection (Deut. 33:12), which our prayers of thanksgiving can focus on (Pss. 42:8; 63:3; Jer. 31:3). However, God's highest form and greatest demonstration of love for us are found in the cross of Christ (Rom. 5:8). He wants us to know that His character of love is integral to our life in Christ: "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:4).

The most excellent path, the way of love, which we are charged to walk in, identifies the traits that God has modeled for us in His person and work ( 1 Cor. 12:31 through 13:13). If we follow His example, we will bear the spiritual fruit of love and will walk in a manner that will allow the gifts of the Spirit (*charismata*) to achieve the purposes of the grace (*charis*) of God.

**GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL**

The terms "grace" and "mercy" represent two aspects of God's character and activity that are distinct but related. To

<sup>13</sup>Although the English particle "so" can signify quantity or quality, the Greek adverb *boutōs* is used by John to mean "manner," "type," "in this way"; John 3:8; 21:1; 1 John 4:11.

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experience the grace of God is to receive a gift that one cannot earn and does not deserve. To experience the mercy of God is to be preserved from punishment that one does in fact deserve. God is the royal judge who holds the power of ultimate and final punishment. When He forgives our sin and guilt, we are experiencing mercy. When we receive the gift of life, we are experiencing grace. 'God's mercy takes away the punishment, while His grace replaces the negative with a positive. We are deserving of punishment, but instead He gives us peace and restores us to wholeness (Isa. 53:5; Titus 2:11; 3:5).

"**The LORD** is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love" (Ps. 103:8). Since we have the need to be brought out of death into life, these aspects of God are often coupled in Scripture to show their interrelatedness (Eph. 2:4-5; cf. Neh. 9:17; Rom. 9:16; Eph. 1:6).

**HOLY**

" 'I am the **LORD** your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy' " (Lev. 11:44). We have been called to be different, because the Lord is different. God reveals himself as "holy," *qadosb* (Heb.), and the essential element of *qadosb* is separation from the mundane, profane, or normal and separation (or dedication) to His purposes. The commands given to Israel called for maintenance of the clear distinction between the spheres of the common and the sacred (Lev. 10:10). This distinction impacted time and space (Sabbath and sanctuary), but was most significantly directed at the individual. Because God is unlike any other being, all those submitted to Him must also be separated-in heart, intent, devotion, and character-to Him, who is truly holy (Exod. 15:11).

By His very nature, God is separated from sin and sinful humanity. The reason that we humans are unable to approach God in our **fallen** state is because we are not holy. The biblical issue of "uncleanness" is not dealing with hygiene, but with holiness (Isa. 6:5). **The** marks of uncleanness include brokenness (see Isa. 30:13-14), sin, violation of God's will, rebellion, and remaining in the state of being incomplete. Because God is whole and righteous, our consecration involves both separation from sin and obedience to Him.

Holiness is God's character and activity, as revealed in the title Yahweh *m'qaddesh*, "the **LORD**, who makes you holy" (Lev. 20:8). The holiness of God should not become simply

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a point of meditation for us, but also an invitation (1 Pet. 1:15) to participate in His righteousness and to worship Him along with the multitudes. The living creatures in the Book of Revelation “never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come’ ” (Rev. 4:8; cf. Ps. 22:3).

## RIGHTEOUS AND JUST

The Holy God is distinct and set apart from sinful humanity. Yet, He is willing to allow us to enter into His presence. This willingness is balanced by the fact that He judges His people in righteousness and justice (Ps. 72:2). These two concepts are often combined to illustrate the standard of measurement that God presents.

Biblical righteousness is seen as conformity to an ethical or moral standard. The “rightness” (Heb. *tsedaqah*)<sup>14</sup> of God is both His character and how He chooses to act. He is straight in ethical and moral character, and therefore serves as the norm for deciding where we stand in relation to Him.

Akin to that facet of God is His justice (Heb. *mishpat*), wherein He exercises all the processes of government. Many modern democratic systems of government separate duties of the state into various branches to balance and hold one another accountable (e.g., legislative to make and pass laws; executive to enforce them and maintain order; judicial to ensure legal consistency and penalize transgressors). The *mishpat* of God finds all of those functions within the character and domain of the one sovereign God (Ps. 89: 14). The KJV often renders this Hebrew term as *judgment*, which emphasizes only one of the multiple aspects of justice (Isa. 61:8; Jer. 9:24; 10:24; Amos 5:24). The justice of God includes judgmental penalty, but subordinates that activity to the overall work of establishing loving justice (Deut. 7:9–10).<sup>15</sup>

The standard that God presents is perfect and upright (Deut. 32:4). Thus, we cannot, in and of ourselves, come up to the standard by which God measures us; we all come short (Rom. 3:23). And “he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof

<sup>14</sup>Tsedeq, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 752–55.

<sup>15</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 288–98.

of this to all men by raising him from the dead’ ” (Acts 17:31). Yet God also seeks the preservation of His creatures now (Ps. 36:5–7), *as well as* offering them hope for the future. The incarnation of Christ included the qualities and activities of righteousness and justice. His substitutionary atonement then passed them to us (Rom. 3:25–26) *so* that we would be able to stand as righteous before the just Judge (2 Cor. 5:21; 2 Pet. 1:1).

## GOD'S NAMES

In our modern culture parents usually choose names for their children based on aesthetics or euphony. In biblical times, however, the giving of names was an occasion and ceremony of considerable significance. The name was an expression of the character, nature, or future of the individual (or at least a declaration by the namer of what was expected of the recipient of the **name**).<sup>16</sup> Throughout Scripture, God has shown that His name was not just a label to distinguish Him from the other deities of the surrounding cultures. Instead, each name that He uses and accepts discloses some facet of His character, nature, will, or authority.

Because the name represented God's person and presence, “calling upon the name of the **LORD**” became a means by which one could enter into an intimate relationship with God. This was a common theme in ancient Near Eastern religions. The surrounding religions, however, attempted to control their deities through manipulation of divine names, while the Israelites were commanded not to use the name of Yahweh their God in an empty and vain manner (Exod. 20:7). Instead, they were to enter into the relationship that was established by means of the name of the Lord and which brought with it providence and salvation.

## OLD TESTAMENT NAMES

The primary word for deity found throughout the Semitic languages is *El*, which possibly was derived from a term that meant power or preeminence. The actual derivation, how-

<sup>16</sup>For example, Elijah means “Yahweh is my God.” The giving of a name could also be the parent's means of expressing great emotion: Rachel, in her final moments of life, named her last son Ben-Oni, “son of my trouble;” Jacob renamed the child Benjamin, “son of my right hand,” that is, “son of blessing” (Gen. 35:18).

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ever, is uncertain.<sup>17</sup> Since it was used commonly by several different religions and cultures, it can be classified as a generic term for "God" or "god" (depending on the context because the Hebrew Scriptures make no distinction between capital and lowercase letters).

For Israel, there was only one true God; therefore, the use of the generic name by other religions was vain and empty, for Israel was to believe in *'El'Elohe Yisra'el*: "God, the God of Israel" (or, possibly, "Mighty is the God of Israel") -Gen. 33:20.

In the Bible this name is often made into a compound, using descriptive terms such as the following: "*'EL* of glory" (Ps. 29:3), "*'EL* of knowledge" (1 Sam. 2:3, KJV), "*'EL* of salvation" (Isa. 12:2), "*'EL* of vengeance" (Ps. 94:1, KJV), and "*'EL*, the great and awesome" (Neh. 1:5; 4:14; 9:32; Dan. 9:4).

The plural form *'elohim* is found almost three thousand times in the Old Testament, and at least twenty-three hundred of those references are speaking of the God of Israel (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 68:1). The term *'elohim*, however, had a broad enough range of meaning to refer also to idols (Exod. 34:17), judges (Exod. 22:8), angels (Ps. 8:5, KJV), or the gods of the other nations (Isa. 36:18; Jer. 5:7). The plural form, when applied to the God of Israel, can be understood<sup>18</sup> as a way of expressing the thought that the fullness of deity is found within the one true God with all attributes, personhood, and powers.<sup>19</sup>

A synonym of *'elohim* is its singular form *'Eloah*, which is also usually translated simply "God." An examination of the scriptural passages suggests that this name takes on a further meaning: reflecting God's ability to protect or destroy (depending on the particular context). It is used parallel to "rock" as a refuge (Deut. 32:15; Ps. 18:31; Isa. 44:8). Those who take refuge in Him find *'Eloah* to be a shield of protection (Prov. 30:5), but a terror for sinners: "Consider this, you who forget *'Eloah*, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue" (Ps. 50:22 see also 114:7; 139:19). Therefore, the name is a

<sup>17</sup>Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 41-43.

<sup>18</sup>"Jews and most liberal theologians understand it as an "intensive plural" or "plural of majesty"; however, there are no real grounds for this grammatically. The plural could be reflecting the Trinity. See chap. 5, p. 147.

<sup>19</sup>Eissfeldt, Otto, 'Trans. by H. Ii. Rowley and P. R. Weiss, "El and Yahweh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1:25-37; Jan. 1956. Harris, *Theological Word-book* vol. 1, 44-45.

comfort for those who humble themselves and seek shelter in Him, but a conveyance of fear to those who are not in right relationship with God.

The name stands as a challenge for people to decide which aspect of God they want to experience, because "blessed is the man whom *'Eloah* corrects" (Job 5:17). Job ultimately chose to revere God in His majesty and repent before His power (37:23; 42:6).<sup>20</sup>

God often revealed something more of His character by providing descriptive phrases or clauses in conjunction with His various names. God first identified himself as *'El Shaddai* (Gen. 17:1)<sup>21</sup> when the time came to renew His covenant with Abram. Some of the biblical contexts suggest that *shaddai* conveys the image of one who has the power to devastate and destroy. In Psalm 68:14, the *Shaddai* "scattered the kings in the land," and a similar thought is spoken of by the prophet Isaiah: "Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from Shaddai" (Isa. 13:6). However, in other passages the emphasis seems to be upon God as the all-sufficient one: "'El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful'" (Gen. 48:3-4; see also 49:24). English translators have usually opted for "all-powerful" or "the Almighty" in recognition of the ability of *'El Shaddai* to bless or devastate as appropriate, since both these powers are within the character and power of that name.

Other descriptive appositions help to reveal the character of God. His exalted nature is displayed in *'El'Elyon*, "God Most High"<sup>22</sup> (Gen. 14:22; Num. 24:16; Deut. 32:8). God's eternal nature is represented by the name *'El'Olam*, with the descriptive term meaning "perpetual" or "everlasting;" when Abraham settled in Beersheba for a long time, "he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God" (Gen. 21:33; cf. Ps. 90:2). All who live under the burden of sin and need deliverance can call upon *'Elohim yish'enu*, "God our Savior" (1 Chron. 16:35; Pss. 65:5; 68:19; 79:9).

The prophet Isaiah was used by the Lord in a powerful way to speak words of judgment and words of comfort to the

<sup>20</sup>Forty-one of the fifty-five verses that contain this term in the Old Testament are found in the Book of Job.

<sup>21</sup>*Shaddai* comes from an old word for "mountain." The New Testament translates it *pantokrator*, "Almighty, omnipotent."

<sup>22</sup>*Elyon* is a superlative adjective built from the verb meaning "go up," therefore carrying the idea of "uppermost," "most high," "exalted."

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nations of his day. The words were not the result of speculation or demographic opinion-poll analysis. The prophet heard from **the** God who revealed himself. His commission in Isaiah **6 can** help to keep our study of God in perspective. There God revealed himself exalted on a royal throne. The great length of His garment confirmed His majesty. Seraphs declared His **holiness**<sup>23</sup> and pronounced the personal name of God, Yahweh.

The name Yahweh appears **6,828** times in 5,790 verses in the Old Testament<sup>24</sup> and is the most frequent designation of God in the Bible. This name is probably derived from the Hebrew verb that means “becoming,” “happening,” “being present.”<sup>25</sup> When Moses faced the dilemma of convincing the Hebrew slaves to receive him as a messenger **from** God, he sought out God’s name. The form that the question takes is really seeking a description of character rather than a title (Exod. 3:1 1-1 5). Moses was not asking, “What shall I call you?” but, “What is your character, or what are you like?” God answered, “**I AM WHO I AM**” or “**I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE**” (v. 14). The Hebrew form (*’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*) indicates being in action.<sup>26</sup>

In the next sentence, God **identifies** himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who shall now be known as **YHWH**.<sup>27</sup> This four-consonant Hebrew expression has been known as the tetragrammaton and is usually translated in English Bibles as **LORD** (in small capital letters). However,

<sup>23</sup>*Seraph* means “burning” or “fiery” and suggests that these heavenly living creatures were either literally on fire, were purified by the fire of God, or so reflected the glory of God that they seemed to be on fire. The placement of their wings implies their experience of God: covering their faces in reverence toward God, covering their feet as a gesture of modesty in His presence, and flight as an expression of God’s supernatural, royal grant to accomplish His purposes. The threefold repetition of “holy” means supremely holy. See p. 129 for the meaning of holy.

<sup>24</sup>Based on a computer text-based search using MacBible 2.4 Hebrew Module from Zondervan Corp., 199 1.

<sup>25</sup>Either *hawab* or *bayab*. For a full discussion of etymology and history of interpretation see Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, vol. 1, 2 10–14.

<sup>26</sup>In Exod. 3: 12, God said, “I will be with you” (Heb. *’Ehyeh ’imakh*). Thus **the** divine name involves purpose and action, not just being.

<sup>27</sup>In Old Testament times the Hebrew alphabet contained twenty-two consonants and no vowels. Therefore the original text had **YHWH**, which was probably pronounced ‘Yahweh,’ though the later Jews in Egypt pronounced it *Yabu*.

lordship is not really an essential aspect of this **term**.<sup>28</sup> Instead, it is a statement that God is a self-existent being (the I AM or I WILL BE) who causes all things to exist and has chosen to be faithfully present with a people that He has called unto himself.

In Old Testament times this name was pronounced freely by the Israelites. The Third Commandment (**Exod. 20:7**)—“**You shall not misuse the name of YHWH your God,**” **that is, use it in an empty manner or, like a name-dropper, for prestige or influence—originally would have had more to do with invoking the divine name in an oath formula than with using the name in a curse.**

Over the centuries, however, scribes and rabbis developed a strategy for upholding this stipulation. Initially, the scribes wrote the Hebrew word *’adonai*, “master,” “lord,” in the margin of the scroll whenever **YHWH** appeared in the inspired text of Scripture. By means of written signals, whoever was reading the scroll publicly was to read *’adonai* from the marginal note instead of the holy name in the biblical passage. The theory was that one could not take the name in vain if one did not even say it. However, this device was not fail-safe and some readers inadvertently would utter the name during the public reading of the Bible in the synagogue. But the high reverence for the text prevented the scribes and rabbis from actually removing the Hebrew name **YHWH** and replacing it with the lesser term *’adonai*.<sup>29</sup>

Eventually the rabbis agreed to insert vowels in the Hebrew text (since **the** inspired text was originally only consonants). They took **the** vowels from *’adonai*, modified them to suit the grammatical requirements of the letters of **YHWH**, and inserted them between the consonants of that divine name, creating **Y<sup>h</sup>oW<sup>a</sup>h**. The vowels would then remind the reader to read *’Adonai*. Some Bibles transliterate this as “Jehovah,” thereby perpetuating an expression that is a coined word, having, as it does, the consonants of a personal name and the vowels of a title.

By New Testament times the name had become shrouded

<sup>28</sup>The numerous verses that draw our attention to the “name” focus less on the lordship of God and more on His faithful presence and absolute existence (Deut. 28:58; Ps. 83:18; Isa. 42:8).

<sup>29</sup>This reverence was disregarded by the Septuagintal translators, who adopted the marginal reading and replaced the tetragrammaton with the Greek word *kurios*, which is basically equivalent to *’adonai* by meaning “master,” “owner,” “lord.”

in secrecy, and the tradition of replacing the ineffable name with the substitute “Lord” was accepted by New Testament writers (which continues in many modern Bible translations, such as **KJV**, **NIV**, **NKJV**). This is acceptable. But we must teach and preach that the character of the “**Lord/Yahweh/I Am/I Will Be**” is active, faithful presence. “All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of [Yahweh] our God for ever and ever” (Mic. 4:5).

The seraphs in Isaiah’s vision combine the personal name of the God of Israel with the descriptive noun *ts’va’oth*, “armies” or “hosts.”<sup>30</sup> This combination of Yahweh and *ts’va’oth* (Sabaoth, **KJV**) occurs in 248 verses in the Bible (sixty-two times in Isaiah, seventy-seven in Jeremiah, fifty-three in Zechariah) and is usually translated “LORD Almighty” (Jer. 19:3; Zech. 3:9–10). This is the affirmation that Yahweh was the true leader of the armies of Israel as well as of the hosts of heaven, both angels and stars, ruling universally as the general chief of staff of the whole universe. Isaiah’s use here (6:3) contradicts the position of the surrounding nations, that each regional god was the warrior god who held exclusive sway in that country. Even if Israel *were* defeated, it would not be because Yahweh was weaker than the next warrior god, but because Yahweh was using the armies of the surrounding countries (which He had created anyway) to judge His unrepentant people.

In the ancient Near East, the king was also the leader of all military operations. Therefore, this title *Yahweh Ts’va’oth* is another way of exalting the *royalty* of God. “Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? Yahweh *Ts’va’oth*—he is the King of glory” (Ps. 24:9–10).

The seraphs in Isaiah’s vision finally confess that “the whole earth is full of his glory.” This glory (Heb. *kavodb*) carries the concept of heaviness, weightiness. The use of “glory” in this context is associated with one who is truly weighty not in measurement of pounds but in position, as recognized in society. In this sense, one would be called weighty if one was honorable, impressive, and worthy of respect.

God’s self-disclosure is related to His intent to dwell among humans; He desires to have His reality and splendor known. But this is possible only when people take account of the stunning quality of His holiness (including the full weight of His attributes), and they set out in faith and obedience to let

<sup>30</sup>Transliterated as Sabaoth (Rom. 9:29; James 5:4, **KJV**).

that character be manifested in them. Yahweh does not typically manifest His presence physically, yet many believers can attest to that subjective and spiritual sensation that the weighty presence of the Lord has descended. That is exactly the image conveyed through Isaiah. God deserves the **reputation** of greatness, glory, kingdom, and power. But it is not just His reputation that fills the earth, it is the very reality of His presence, the full weight of His glory (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17, **KJV**).

God’s desire is that all persons gladly recognize His glory. Progressively, God has dwelt in glory among people; **first** in the pillar of **fire** and cloud, then in the tabernacle, then in the temple in Jerusalem, then in the flesh as His Son, Jesus of Nazareth, and now in us by His Holy Spirit. “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1: 14). Now we can know that we all are the temple of Yahweh’s most Holy Spirit ( 1 Cor. 3:16–17).

The name of the “**I am/I will be**” in conjunction with particular descriptive terms often serves as a confession of faith that further reveals the nature of God. When Isaac asked his father, “Here is the **fire** and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham assured his son that God would see to [yireh] it (Gen. 22:7–8). After sacrificing the substitute ram that had been caught in the thicket, Abraham called that place *Yahweh yireb*, “**the LORD will provide**” (v. 14).<sup>31</sup>

Abraham’s faith went beyond a positive confession of God as simply a material provider, however. His God was one who was **personally** involved and willing to look into the problem and bring about a resolution. The problem was resolved by providing a substitute for Isaac as a pleasing sacrificial offering. After the fact, we can testify that Yahweh really does provide. But during the trek up the mountain, Abraham trusted God to see to it, since he had assured the servants who were waiting in the distance that both he and the boy would return to them. Abraham’s faith was total abandon to the ability of God to look into any problem and take care of it according to divine wisdom and plan, even if that meant obedient death and then God raising the dead (see Heb. 11: 17-19).

The tetragrammaton is used also in combination with a number of other terms that serve to describe many facets of the Lord’s character, nature, promises, and activities. *Yahweh*

<sup>31</sup>Usually rendered in English “Jehovah Jireh.”

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*Shammah*, “the LORD is there,” serves as a promise of Yahweh’s presence and power in the city of Ezekiel’s prophecy by placing His name there (Ezek. 48:35).

*Yahweh ‘osenu*, “the LORD our Maker,” is a declaration of His ability and willingness to take things that exist and fashion them into usefulness (Ps. 95:6).

The Hebrews in the wilderness experienced *Yahweh roph’ekha*, “the LORD your physician,” or “the LORD who heals you,” if they listened and obeyed His commands (Exod. 15:26).<sup>32</sup> In this way they were able to avoid the plagues and diseases of Egypt and be made whole. Our Lord by His nature is a healer for those who are submitted to His power and will.

When the Lord led Moses and Israel successfully against the Amalekites, Moses erected an altar dedicated to Yahweh *nissi*, “The LORD is my Banner” (Exod. 17: 15). A banner was a flag that served as a rallying point throughout battle or any other common action.<sup>33</sup> This function of a raised banner appears typologically in the lifting of the bronze serpent on a pole and in the Savior who would serve as an ensign to the peoples as He was drawing all nations to himself (Num. 2 1:8–9; Isa. 62:10–11; John 3:14; Phil. 2:9).

When God spoke words of peace to Gideon, he built an altar to *Yahweh Shalom*, “The LORD is Peace” (Judg. 6:23). The essence of biblical *shalom* is completeness, wholeness, harmony, fulfillment, in the sense of taking that which is incomplete or shattered and making it complete by means of a sovereign act.<sup>34</sup> We can face difficult challenges, as Gideon did in confronting the Midianites, knowing that God grants us peace because that is one way He manifests His nature.

God’s people need a protector and provider, so God has revealed himself as *Yahweh ro’i*, “the LORD is my shepherd” (Ps. 23:1). All the positive aspects of ancient Near Eastern shepherding can be found in the faithful Lord (leading, feeding, defending, caring, healing, training, correcting, and being willing to die in the process if necessary).

When Jeremiah prophesied of a king to come, the righteous

<sup>32</sup>The form *Jehovah rapba* is not in the Bible. *Rapba* means “I he healed” or “He used to heal.” *Roph’ekha* combines *rophe*, a participle translated “physician” in Jer. 8:22 (KJV, NIV), and *Kha*, a pronoun meaning “your” or “you.” *Kha* is singular and emphasizes that God is the physician for each of you individually.

<sup>33</sup>Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, vol. 2, 583.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 93 1.

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branch of David that God would raise up, the name that this king would be known by was revealed as *Yahweh tsidkenu*, “The LORD Our Righteousness” (Jer. 23:6; see also 33:16). It is God’s nature to act in justice and judgment as He works to place us in right standing with Him. He becomes the norm and standard by which we can measure our lives. Because God chose to make “him who had no sin to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21), we can participate in the promise of God to declare us righteous ourselves. “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

One way that God has shown His desire to have a personal relationship with His people is through the description of himself as “Father.” This view of God as a father is much more developed in the New Testament than in the Old, occurring sixty-five times in the first three Gospels and over one hundred times in John’s Gospel alone. The Old Testament identifies God as father only fifteen times (usually in relation to the nation or people of Israel).

The particular aspects of fatherhood that seem to be emphasized include creation (Deut. 32:6), redemption responsibility (Isa. 63:16), craftsmanship (Isa. 64:8), familial friendship (Jer. 3:4), passing along inheritance (Jer. 3:19), leadership (Jer. 3 1:9), being honorable (Mal. 1:6), and willing to punish transgression (Mal. 2:10,12). God is also noted as the Father of particular individuals, especially the monarchs David and Solomon. In relationship to them, God the Father is willing to punish error (2 Sam. 7: 14), while being faithful in His love toward His children (1 Chron. 17:13). Above all, God the Father promises to be faithful forever, with a willingness to remain involved in the **fathering** process for eternity (1 Chron. 22:10).

## NEW TESTAMENT NAMES

The New Testament gives a much clearer revelation of the triune God than the Old Testament. God is Father (John 8:54; 20: 17), Son (Phil. 2:5–7; Heb. 1:8), and Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3–4; 1 Cor. 3:16). Since many of the names, titles, and attributes of God properly fit under the categories of “Trinity,” “Christ,” and “Holy Spirit,” they are dealt with in greater depth in those chapters in this book. The following will focus on the names and titles that speak more directly about the one true God.

Our term “theology” is derived from the Greek word *theos*.

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*The* translators of the Septuagint adopted it as the appropriate expression to convey the Hebrew *'elohim* and its related synonyms, and this understanding is continued in the New Testament. *Theos* was also the generic term for divine beings, such as when the Maltese said Paul was a god after he had survived the viper bite (Acts 28:6). The term can be translated "god," "gods," or "God," depending on the literary context, much as the Hebrew term *'El* (Matt. 1:23; 1 Cor. 8:5; Gal. 4:8). However, the use of this Greek word in no way makes concession to the existence of other gods, since literary context is not the same as spiritual context. Within spiritual reality, there is only one true Divine Being: "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no *theos* but one" (1 Cor. 8:4). God makes exclusive claim to this term as a further revelation of himself. The same can be said of the Greek expression *logos*, "Word" (John 1:1,14).<sup>35</sup>

The Old Testament introduces the image of God as Father; the New Testament displays how that relationship is to be fully experienced. Jesus speaks often of God in intimate terms. No Old Testament prayer addresses God as "Father." Yet, when Jesus trained His disciples in prayer He expected them to take the posture of children together and say, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matt. 6:9). Our God is the "Father" with *all* the power of heaven (Matt. 26:53; John 10:29), and He utilizes that power to keep, prune, sustain, call, love, preserve, provide, and glorify (John 6:32; 8:54; 12:26; 14:21,23; 15:1; 16:23).

The apostle Paul summarized his own theology by focusing on our need for unmerited favor and wholeness. He opens most of his epistles with this statement of invocation: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:7; see also 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; etc.).

In Greek philosophy, the divine beings were described as "unmoved movers," "the cause of all being," "pure being," "the world soul," and with other expressions of distant impersonality. Jesus stood firmly within the Old Testament revelation and taught that God is personal. Although Jesus spoke of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Mark 12:26); Lord (Mark 5:19; 12:29; Luke 20:37); Lord of heaven and earth (Matt. 11:25); Lord of the harvest (Matt. 9:38); the only God (John 5:44); Most High (Luke 6:35); Ring (Matt. 5:35)—His

<sup>35</sup>See chap. 9, pp. 299, 301.

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favorite title for God was "Father,"<sup>36</sup> given in the Greek New Testament as *patēr* (from which we derive "patriarch" and "paternal"). An exception to this is found in Mark 14:36, where the original Aramaic term *'abba*, which Jesus actually used to address God, is *retained*.<sup>37</sup>

Paul designated God as *'abba* on two occasions: "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father'" (Gk. *ho patēr*) (Gal. 4:6). "You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:15–16). That is, in the Early Church, Jewish believers would be calling on God, *'Abba*, "O Father!"<sup>38</sup> and Gentile believers would be crying out, *Ho Pater*, "O Father!" At the same time, the Spirit would be making it real to them that God really is our Father. The uniqueness of the term is in the fact that Jesus gave it a warmth and tenderness usually not found.<sup>39</sup> It characterized well not only His own relationship with God, but also the kind of relationship that He ultimately intended for His disciples.

## GOD'S NATURE

The Almighty God cannot be fully comprehended by humanity, yet He has shown himself in various times and ways, that we might truly know Him. God is incomprehensible and His very existence cannot be proven by mere human logic. Rather than detracting from His attributes, this is a confessional declaration of our limits and God's infinitude. Our understanding of God can be built upon two primary **presup-**

<sup>36</sup>Sixty-five times in the Synoptics; over one hundred times in John.

<sup>37</sup>Occasionally the Greek manuscripts would continue to use the older Hebrew or Aramaic words to make a point or to retain the original flavor of the lesson or figure of speech. In Hebrew, God would be addressed as *Ha'av* and in the Aramaic used by Jews in New Testament times, *'Abba*, both meaning "The Father" or "O Father," both very respectful terms.

<sup>38</sup>Later Jews made *'Abba* a term of informal address: "An infant cannot say *'abba* (daddy) and *'amma* (mama) until it has tasted wheat [i.e., until it has been weaned]," Talmud Sanhedrin, 8:70B:VII:G. In New Testament times, however, it was a term of respect. See *The New Testament; The Complete Biblical Library*, vol. 11. *Greek English Dictionary Alpha-Gamma* (Springfield, Mo.: The Complete Biblical Library, 1990), 20-21.

<sup>39</sup>Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: The Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 56-57.

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positions: (1) God exists and (2) He has revealed himself adequately to us through His inspired revelation.”

God is not to be explained, but believed and described. We can build our doctrine of God upon the preceding pre-suppositions and the evidences that He has given in Scripture. Some Scripture passages attribute qualities to the being of God that humans do not have, while other passages describe Him in terms of moral attributes that can be shared by humans in some limited measure.

God's constitutional nature is identified most often by those attributes that find no analogy in our human existence. God exists in and of himself, without dependence upon any other. He himself is the source of life, both in creation and sustenance. God is spirit; He is not confined to material existence and is imperceptible to the physical eye. His nature does not change, but stands **firm**. Since God himself is the ground of time, He cannot be bound by time. He is eternal, without beginning or end. God is thoroughly consistent within himself. Space is unable to limit or bound God, so He is omnipresent, and being able to do absolutely anything consistent with His nature and productive to His purposes, He is omnipotent. Furthermore, God is omniscient, knowledgeable concerning all truth—past, present, and future, possible and actual. In all of these attributes, the believer can find both comfort and **confirmation** of faith, while the unbeliever is served a warning and motivated toward belief.

The biblical evidences of God's moral attributes display characteristics that may also be found in humankind, but ours pale in the glory of the Lord's brilliant display. Of paramount importance in this group is God's holiness, His absolute purity and exaltation above all creatures. Included in this fundamental perfection are His righteousness, resulting in the establishment of laws, and His justice, resulting in the execution of His laws. The affection God has for His children is expressed by His sacrificial love. God's love is unselfish, **self**-initiated, righteous, and everlasting. Furthermore, God shows benevolence by feeling and manifesting **affection** for His creation in general. He shows mercy by directing goodness to those in misery and distress and by withholding deserved punishment. He also manifests grace as goodness given to the totally undeserving.

<sup>40</sup>Both the Scriptures (1 Thess. 2:13; Heb 4: 12) and the Messiah (John 1:1; 1 John 1:1).

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The wisdom of God is seen in the divine purposes and in the plans He uses to achieve those purposes. The primary example of God's wisdom, incarnate and in action, is in the person and work of Jesus. Other expressions of wisdom include patience, whereby God withholds His righteous judgment and wrath from rebellious sinners, and also truthfulness, wherein God stands by His Word as forerunner and foundation for our trust in His Word and action. Jesus, the Messiah of God, is the Truth in flesh. Finally, there is the moral perfection of faithfulness. God is absolutely reliable in covenant keeping, trustworthy in forgiving, and never failing in His promises, steadfastly providing a way for us. The image of a rock is often utilized to portray our Lord's firmness and protection.

## GOD'S ACTIVITIES

One other aspect requiring attention within the doctrine of God is that of His activities. This aspect can be divided into His decrees and His providence and preservation. The decrees of God are His eternal plan, and they have certain characteristics: They are all part of one plan, which is unchanging and everlasting (Eph. 3:11; James 1: 17). They are free from and not conditioned by other beings (Ps. 135:6). **They** deal with God's actions and not His nature (Rom. 3:26). Within these decrees are those actions done by God for which He is sovereignly responsible, and then those actions allowed by God to happen but for which He is not responsible.\* On the basis of this distinction we can see that God is neither the author of evil, even though He is the creator of all subordinates, nor is He the final cause of sin.

God is also actively sustaining the world He created. In preservation He works to uphold His laws and powers in creation (Acts 17:25). In providence He works continuously to control all things in the universe for the purpose of bringing about His wise and loving plan in ways consistent with the agency of His free creatures (Gen. 20:6; 50:20; Job 1: 12; Rom. 1:24).

Recognizing this and delighting in the Lord, meditating upon His Word day and night, will bring every blessing of God, for we will understand who He is and how to worship and serve Him.

<sup>41</sup>For discussion of the matter of election from Calvinistic and Arminian viewpoints, see chap. 1, pp. 49-50 and chap. 10, pp. 352, 355-60.



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The psalms are helpful in our worship. Many psalms open with the traditional Hebrew call to worship: Hallelujah! meaning "Praise the Lord!" (see Pss. 106; 111; 112; 113; 135; 146; 147; 148; 149; 150). In our modern experience this term often serves as a statement of exaltation. However, it began as a command to worship. The psalms that begin with this call to worship usually furnish information about Yahweh that focuses worship on Him and reveals features of His greatness that are worthy of praise.

Serving God begins by praying in His name. This means recognizing how distinct His nature is as revealed in the magnificent variety of His names, for He has revealed himself to us that we might glorify Him and do His will.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What obstacles will we face when we express our belief in the existence of God to those who do not share our worldview, and in what ways can we overcome those obstacles?
2. How does God reveal himself to us so that we might know Him?
3. How does our present experience of time affect our understanding of God's eternity?
4. How does the wisdom of God compare with the popular human concept of acquired wisdom?
5. What part does sacrifice play in the love that God has manifested?
6. In what specific ways have you experienced the grace and mercy of the Lord?
7. In what ways does the holiness of God, as reported in Scripture, help us to avoid the legalism that sometimes hinders some human expressions of holiness?
8. What do the names of God tell us about the personality and purposes of God?
9. In what ways has the theme of God as our Father in the Old Testament been further revealed in the New Testament?
10. What is the relationship between God's foreknowledge, predestination, and sovereignty?

CHAPTER FIVE*The Holy Trinity**Kerry D. McRoberts*

The Father **uncreated**, the Son **uncreated**: the Holy Spirit **uncreated**.

The Father immeasurable, the Son immeasurable: the Holy Spirit immeasurable.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal: the Holy spirit eternal. And, nevertheless, not three eternals: but one eternal.'

The Trinity is a mystery. Reverent acknowledgment of that which is not revealed in Holy Scripture is necessary before entering the inner sanctum of the Holy One to inquire into His nature. The limitless glory of God should impress us with a sense of our own insignificance in contrast with Him, who is "high and exalted."

Does our acknowledgment of the mystery of the inner workings of God, particularly of the Trinity, then call for an abandonment of reason? Not at all. Mysteries do indeed exist in biblical **Christianity**, but "Christianity, as a 'revealed religion,' focuses on revelation-and revelation, by definition, makes manifest rather than concealing."<sup>\*</sup>

Reason does discover a stumbling block when confronted with the paradoxical character of Trinitarian theology. "But," Martin Luther strenuously asserted, "since it is based on clear

<sup>\*</sup>R. O. P. Taylor, *The Athanasian Creed in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), 57.

<sup>\*</sup>John Warwick Montgomery, *Principalities and Powers: The World of the Occult* (Minneapolis: Pyramid Publications for Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1975), 25.

Scripture, reason must be silent at this point and we must believe.”<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the role of reason is ministerial, never magisterial (i.e., rationalistic), in relation to Scripture and, specifically, to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity.\* We are therefore not attempting to explain God, but rather to consider the historical evidence that establishes the identity of Jesus as both man and God (by virtue of His miraculous acts and divine character), and further, “to incorporate the truth which Jesus thereby validated as to His eternal relation with God the Father and with God the Holy Spirit.”<sup>5</sup>

Historically, the Church formulated its doctrine of the Trinity following great debate concerning the Christological problem of the relationship of Jesus of Nazareth to the Father. Three distinct Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—are manifest in Scripture as God, while at the same time the entirety of the Bible tenaciously holds to the Jewish *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4).<sup>6</sup>

The conclusion derived from the biblical data is that the God of the Bible is (in the words of the Athanasian Creed) “one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.” Does this sound irrational? Such a charge against the doctrine of the Trinity may very well itself be irrational: “[W]hat is irrational is to suppress the biblical evidence of the Trinity in favor of Unity, or the evidence for Unity in favor of Trinity.” “Our data must take precedence over our **models—or**, stating it better, our models must sensitively reflect the full range of **data**.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, our methodological sights must be scripturally focused with respect to the tenuous relationship between unity and

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 199.

\*The word “trinity” does not appear in Scripture. But in the light of the biblical data, the Church is compelled to make use of words such as “trinity” for the purpose of systematizing the teaching of the Bible and exposing error in false teachers. The term “trinity” is therefore merely intended to express what the Bible clearly communicates concerning the nature of the one true God.

<sup>5</sup>Montgomery, *Principalities and Powers*, 45–46.

<sup>6</sup>“One” (Heb. *’echad*) can mean a compound or complex unity. The Hebrew has another word, *yachid*, which can mean “only one,” but it is never used in passages relating to the nature of God.

<sup>7</sup>John Warwick Montgomery, *How Do We Know There Is a God?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1973), 14.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

trinity, lest we polarize the doctrine of the Trinity into one of two extremes: suppression of the evidence in favor of unity (resulting in unitarianism, i.e., one solitary God) or misuse of the evidence for triunity (resulting in tritheism, i.e., three separate gods).

An objective analysis of the biblical data concerning the relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit reveals that this great doctrine of the Church is not an abstract notion, but is in fact a revelational truth. Therefore, before discussing the historical development and formulation of Trinitarian theology, we will consider the biblical data for the doctrine.

#### BIBLICAL DATA FOR THE DOCTRINE

##### THE OLD TESTAMENT

God, in the Old Testament, is one God, revealing himself by His names, His attributes, and His acts.<sup>9</sup> A shaft of light breaks through the long shadow of the Old Testament, however, intimating plurality (a distinction of persons) in the Godhead: “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness’ ” (Gen. 1:26).<sup>10</sup> That God could not have been conversing with angels or other unidentified beings is clearly revealed in verse 27, which refers to the special creation of man “in the image of God.” The context indicates a divine interpersonal communication requiring a unity of Persons in the Godhead.

Other intimations of personal distinctions in the Godhead are revealed in passages that make reference to “the angel of the LORD” (Heb. *Yahweh*). This angel is distinguished from other angels. He is personally identified with Yahweh and at the same time distinguished from Him (Gen. 16:7–13; 18:1–21; 19:1–28; 32:24–30—Jacob says, “I saw God face to face,” with reference to the angel of the Lord). In Isaiah 48:16; 61:1; and 63:9–10, the Messiah speaks. In one instance He identifies **himself with** God and the Spirit in personal unity as the three members of the Godhead. And yet, in another instance, the Messiah continues (still speaking in **first** person) to distinguish himself from God and the Spirit.

Zechariah is most illuminating as he speaks for God about

<sup>9</sup>See chap. 4.

<sup>10</sup>“Some, especially among the Jews, take the plurals here to be the plural of majesty or something like an editor’s “we,” but there is no parallel for this in the Bible.

the Messiah's crucifixion: "I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for *him as* one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for *a firstborn son*'" (Zech. 12: 10). Clearly the one true God is speaking in the first person ("me") in reference to having been "pierced," and yet He himself makes the grammatical shift from the first person to the third person ("him") in referring to the Messiah's sufferings because of having been "pierced." The revelation of plurality in the Godhead is quite evident in this passage.

This leads us from the shadows of the Old Testament into the greater light of the New Testament's revelation.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

John commences the prologue of his Gospel with revelation of the Word": "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). B. F. Westcott observes that here John carries our thought beyond the beginning of creation in time to eternity.\* The verb "was" (Gk. *ên*, the imperfect of *eimi*, "to be") appears three times in this verse, and by the use of this verse the apostle conveys the concept that neither God nor the *Logos* has a beginning; their existence together has been and is continuous.<sup>13</sup>

The second part of the verse continues, "And the Word was with God [*pros ton theon*]." *The Logos* has existed with God in perfect fellowship throughout all eternity. The word *pros* (with) reveals the intimate "face to face" relationship

<sup>13</sup>Gk. *Logos* It is significant that John chose to identify Christ in His preincarnate state as the *Logos* instead of *Sophia* (wisdom). John avoids the contaminations of pre-Gnostic teachings that either denied the humanity of the Christ or separated the Christ from the man Jesus. The *Logos*, who is eternal, became flesh" (*sarx egeneto*, v. 14).

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 5 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1932), 3. "In the beginning" (en *archei*) is similar to the Hebrew (*b'rêshith*) in Genesis 1: 1. Neither *urbeî* nor *rêshith* has the definite article, but this does not bear any special meaning in the interpretation of the text unless it points us to the very beginning before all other beginnings.

<sup>13</sup>Robertson notes: "Quite a different verb (*egeneto*, 'became') appears in v. 14 for the beginning of the Incarnation of the Logos." Ibid.

the Father and the Son have always **shared**.<sup>14</sup> John's final phrase is a clear declaration of the deity of the Word: "And the Word was God."<sup>15</sup>

John continues to tell us, by revelation, that the Word entered the plane of history (1:14) as Jesus of Nazareth: **himself** "God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side" and who has made the Father known (1:18).<sup>16</sup> The New Testament further reveals that because He has shared in God's glory from all eternity (John 17:5), Jesus Christ is the object of worship reserved only for God: "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11; see also Exod. 20:3; Isa. 45:23; Heb. 1:8).

The eternal Word, Jesus Christ, is the one through whom God the Father created **all** things (John 1:3; Rev. 3:14).<sup>17</sup> Jesus

<sup>14</sup>Robertson observes: "*Pros with the accusative presents a plane of equality and intimacy, face to face with each other. In 1 John 2:1 we have a like use of pros: 'We have a Paraclete with the Father' (paraklêton ecbomen pros ton puterou). See prosôpon pros prosôpon (face to face, 1 Cor. 13:12), a triple use of pros." Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Robertson comments: "By exact and careful language John denied Sabellianism by not saying *ho theos ên ho logos*. That would mean that all of God was expressed in *ho logos* and the terms would be interchangeable, each having the article." Ibid, 4. It should be noted also that in the New Testament God the Father is often referred to as *theos* without the article, and Jesus is called *ho theos* (John 20:28). Therefore, Jesus is just as fully divine, just as fully God, as the Father.

For further study, see: E. C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 70 (1933), 12-21. Cf. B. M. Metzger, "On the Translation of John i. 1," *Expository Times* 73 (1951-52), 125-26, and C. F. D. Moule, "The Language of the New Testament," Inaugural Lecture, delivered at Cambridge University, 23 May 1952, 12-14.

<sup>16</sup>The KJV has "the only begotten Son" (*ho monogenês huios*). However, some of the oldest Greek manuscripts (Aleph, B, C, L) read *monogenês theos Monogenês* by New Testament times had lost the meaning of "only begotten" and had come to mean "only" in the sense of special, unique, one-of-a-kind, and was so used of Abraham's special and beloved son, Isaac (Heb. 11:17). That "God the One and Only" is a correct translation is supported by John 1:1, which clearly states that the *Logos* is deity (*theos*), and John 1:14 uses the term *monogenês* as a description of the uniqueness of the Logos in His identification with the Father.

<sup>17</sup>The KJV of Rev. 3:14 reads, "the beginning of the creation of God." The NIV reads, "the ruler of God's creation." "Beginning" or "ruler" is *archê*, from which we derive the word "architect," which has to do with designing and building. This is what Jesus Christ is, the Designer and Architect of all creation. *Archê* is also translated "principality" (Eph. 1:21, KJV) or "rule" (Eph. 1:21, NIV, NASB margin); therefore, the NIV is also appropriate.

identifies himself as the sovereign “I am” (John 8:58; cf. Exod. 3:14).<sup>18</sup> We note in John 8:59 that the Jews were moved to pick up stones and kill Jesus because of this claim. They tried to do the same later, following His claim in John 10:30, “I and the Father are one.” The Jews who heard Him considered Jesus a blasphemer, “You, a mere man, claim to be God” (John 10:33; cf. John 5:18).

**Paul identifies Jesus as the God of providence: “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). Jesus is the “Mighty God” who will reign as King on David’s throne and make it eternal (Isa. 9:6–7). His knowledge is perfect and complete. Peter addressed our Lord: “‘Lord, you know all things’” (John 2:1: 17). Christ himself said, “‘No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’” (Matt. 11:27; cf. John 10:15).<sup>19</sup>**

Jesus is now everywhere present (Matt. 18:20) and unchanging (Heb. 13:8). He shares with the Father the title “the First and the Last,” and He is “the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev. 1:17; 22:13). Jesus is our Redeemer and Savior (John 3:16–17; Heb. 9:28; 1 John 2:2), our Life and Light (John 1:4), our Shepherd (John 10:14; 1 Pet. 5:4), our Justifier, (Rom. 5: 1) and the soon-coming “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19: 16). **Jesus is Truth (John 14:6)** and the Comforter whose comfort and help overflows into our lives (2 Cor. 1:5). Isaiah further calls Him our “Counselor” (Isa. 9:6), and He is the Rock (Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 10:4). He is holy (Luke 1:35), and He dwells within those who call upon His name (Rom. 10:9–10; Eph. 3:17).

All that can be said of God the Father, can be said of Jesus Christ. “In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col. 2:9); “God over all, forever praised!” (Rom. 9:5). Jesus spoke of His full equality with the Father: “ ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father ... **I am** in the Father, and ... the Father in me’ ” (John 14:9–10).

Jesus claimed full deity for the Holy Spirit, “ ‘I will ask the

<sup>18</sup>The verb *efmf* (“I am”) with the emphatic *egō* (“I”) clearly means that Jesus is claiming to be a “timeless being,” and therefore God. The context allows no other interpretation of the text.

The fact that Jesus did not know the time of His return (Matt. 24:36) was undoubtedly a limitation He placed on himself while He was here on earth identifying himself with humankind. Cf. John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 45–46. He certainly has that knowledge now that He has returned to the glory He shares with the Father (John 17:5).

Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever” (John 14:16).<sup>20</sup> By calling the Holy Spirit *allon paraklēton* (“another Helper of the same kind as himself”),<sup>21</sup> Jesus affirmed that everything that can be said about His nature can be said of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Bible testifies to the deity of the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity.

Psalms 104:30 reveals the Holy Spirit as the Creator: “When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.” Peter refers to Him as God (Acts 5:3–4), and the author of Hebrews calls Him the “eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14).

**As God**, the Holy Spirit possesses the attributes of deity. He knows everything: “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ... **No** one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:10–11). He is everywhere present (Ps. 139:7–8). Although the Holy Spirit distributes gifts among believers, He himself remains “one and the same” (1 Cor. 12: 11); He is constant in His nature. He is Truth (John 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6). He is the Author of Life (John 3:3–6; Rom. 8:10) through rebirth and renewal (Titus 3:5), and He seals us for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).

**The Father** is our Sanctifier (1 Thess. 5:23), Jesus Christ is our Sanctifier (1 Cor. 1:2), and the Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier (Rom. 15:16). **The Holy Spirit** is our “Counselor” (John 14: 16, 26; 15:26), and He dwells within those who fear Him (John 14:17; 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16). In Isaiah 6:8–10, Isaiah identifies the “Lord” as speaking, and Paul refers the same passage to the Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25–26). With regard to this, John Calvin observes: “Indeed, where the prophets usually say that the words they utter are those of the Lord of Hosts, Christ and the apostles refer them to the Holy Spirit [cf. 2 Peter 1:21].” Calvin then concludes, “It therefore follows that he who is pre-eminently the author of prophecies is truly Jehovah [*Yahweh*].”<sup>22</sup>

“**The** concept of the Triune God is found only in the Judeo-

<sup>20</sup>For further discussion of the personality of the Holy Spirit see chap. 11, pp. 377–78.

<sup>21</sup>*Allos* (“another of the same kind”) is distinguished in the Greek from *beteros* (“another of a different kind”); cf. Gal. 1:6.

<sup>22</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, John McNeill, ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 140.

CHAPTER  
**5**The Holy  
Trinity

Christian **tradition**.<sup>23</sup> This concept has not come through the speculation of the wise men of this world, but through the step-by-step revelation given in God's Word. Everywhere in the writings of the apostles the Trinity is assumed and implicit (e.g., Eph. 1:1-14; 1 Pet. 1:2). Clearly, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit eternally exist as three distinct Persons, and yet the Scriptures also reveal the **unity**<sup>24</sup> of the three members of the **Godhead**.<sup>25</sup>

The Persons of the Trinity have separate, though never conflicting wills (Luke 22:42; 1 Cor. 12:11). The Father speaks to the Son using the second-person pronoun "you": "You are my Son, whom I love" (Luke 3:22). Jesus offered himself to the Father through the Spirit (Heb. 9:14). Jesus states that He came "not to do my *will* but to do the *will of him who sent me*" (John 6:38).

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ reveals the interrelationships of the three members of the Trinity. Luke's account says: "The angel answered, 'The *Holy Spirit* will come upon you, and the power of the *Most High* will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the *Son of God*'" (Luke 1:35).

The one God is revealed as a trinity at the baptism of Jesus Christ. The Son came up out of the water. The Holy Spirit descended as a **dove**. The Father spoke from heaven (Matt. 3:16-17). At creation, the Bible refers to the Spirit as being involved (Gen. 1:2); however, the author of Hebrews explicitly states that the Father is the Creator (Heb. 1:2), and John shows creation was accomplished "**through**"<sup>26</sup> the Son (John 1:3; Rev. 3:14). When the apostle Paul announces to the Athenians that God "made the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:24), we can only reasonably conclude with Athanasius that God is "one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity."

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is another outstanding example of the relationship of the triune **God**.

<sup>23</sup>James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 102.

<sup>24</sup>"Consubstantiality," i.e., the three Persons are of the same "substance" or "essence," and they are each therefore revealed as deity.

<sup>25</sup>Luther, following Augustine, inferred that the three "persons" cannot be theologically distinguished from each other by anything else than their respective relationships to one another as Father, Son, and Spirit. (Martin Luther, *The Smalcald Articles*, Part 1, Statement 1.)

<sup>26</sup>Gk. *dia*, used of secondary agency, as when God spoke "through" the prophets. Jesus was the one Mediator in creation.

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head in redemption. Paul states that the Father of Jesus Christ raised our Lord from the dead (Rom. 1:4; cf. 2 Cor. 1:3). Jesus, however, emphatically claims that He would raise up His own body from the grave in resurrection glory (John 2:19-21). In another place, Paul declares that through the Holy Spirit God raised up Christ from the dead (Rom. 8:11; cf. Rom. 1:4). Luke places the theological capstone on Trinitarian orthodoxy by recording the apostle Paul's proclamation to the Athenians that the one God raised up Christ from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

Jesus places the three members of the Godhead on the same divine plane in commanding His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

The apostle Paul, a monotheistic Jew trained under the great rabbinic scholar Gamaliel, "a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee" (Phil. 3:5), was impressed with Trinitarian theology, as shown in his salutation to the church at Corinth: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14).<sup>27</sup> The biblical data definitely brings us to the conclusion that within the nature of the one true God are three Persons, each of which is coeternal, coequal, and coexistent.

The orthodox theologian humbly subordinates his or her thinking on Trinitarian theology to the data revealed in the Word of God in much the same way the physicist does in formulating the paradoxical wave-particle theory:

Quantum physicists agree that subatomic entities are a mixture of wave properties (W), particle properties (P), and quantum properties (h). High-speed electrons, when shot through a nickel crystal or a metallic film (as fast cathode-rays or even B-rays), diffract like X-rays. In principle, the B-ray is just like the sunlight used in a double-slit or bi-prism experiment. Diffraction is a criterion of wave-like behaviour in substances; all classical wave theory rests on this. Besides this behaviour, however, electrons have long been thought of as electrically charged particles. A transverse magnetic field will deflect an electron beam and its diffraction pattern. Only particles

<sup>27</sup>Other texts that reveal the relations of the triune God include 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:4-5; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 3:11-14; 1 Thess. 5:18-19; 1 Pet. 1:2. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longman's, 1950), 23, for a more complete list of texts relevant to the doctrine of the Trinity.

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behave in **this** manner; all classical electromagnetic theory depends upon **this**. *To explain all the evidence electrons must be both particulate and undulatory* [emphasis added]. An electron is a **PWh**.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>101</sup>N. R. Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 1 44.<sup>28</sup>

The analogy of the Trinity with **PWh** well illustrates the preliminary precautions of this chapter; that is, whereas the theologian must always strive for rationality in theological formulation, he must also choose revelation over the finite restrictions of human logic. Scripture alone is the touchstone for the theology of the Christian Church.

## HISTORICAL FORMULATION OF THE DOCTRINE

Although Calvin was speaking of another doctrinal concern, his warning is equally applicable to Trinitarian formulation: "If anyone with carefree assurance breaks into this place, he will not succeed in satisfying his curiosity and he will enter a labyrinth from which he can find no **exit**."<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, the historical formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity is properly characterized as a terminological maze wherein many paths lead to heretical dead **ends**.<sup>30</sup>

The first four centuries of the Christian Church were dominated by a single motif, the Christological concept of Logos.<sup>31</sup> This concept is uniquely Johannine, found in both the prologue of the apostle's Gospel and his first epistle. The ecclesiastical controversy of the time focused on the question, "What does John mean by his use of Logos?" The controversy

<sup>28</sup>Quoted here by permission of Cambridge University Press. Quoted in John Warwick Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship Inc., 1970), 298.

<sup>29</sup>Quoted in Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies: The Image of Christ in the Mir of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1984), 154.

<sup>30</sup>Contemporary attempts to leap over the maze (e.g., the radical transcendentalism of Barth's neoorthodoxy) or the self-determined effort to tunnel under the maze in the "moment" (e.g., Bultmann's existentialism) are not options for the orthodox Christian. Rather, sound biblical theology is a "map," as J. I. Packer puts it, "to be used for the believer's route-finding in his personal pilgrimage of following his Lord." *Hot Tub Religion* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1987), 14.

<sup>31</sup>See chap. 9, pp. 299-301.

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reached its climax in the fourth century at the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325).

In the second century the apostolic fathers displayed an undeveloped Christology. The relationship between **the two** natures in Christ, the human and the **divine**,<sup>32</sup> is not clearly articulated in their works. The doctrine of the Trinity is implied in their high Christology, but is not made explicit.

The great defenders of the faith in the Early Church (e.g., Irenaeus, Justin Martyr) referred to Christ as the eternal Logos. By their time, the concept of the **Logos** appears to have been understood as an eternal power or attribute of God that, in some inexplicable manner, dwells in Christ. An eternally personal **Logos**, in relationship to the Father, was yet without definition at this period.

## IRENÆUS AGAINST THE Gnostics

We enter the ecclesiastical maze of the historical development of Trinitarian theology in the footsteps of Irenaeus. He was the bishop of Lyons, in Gaul, and a disciple of Polycarp, who himself was a disciple of the apostle **John**.<sup>33</sup> In Irenaeus, therefore, we have a direct tie to apostolic teaching.

Irenaeus entered the fray of theological debate in the last third of the second century. He is best known for his arguments against the Gnostics.<sup>34</sup> For centuries his great work *Against Heresies* has been a primary source of defense against the spiritually toxic influences of Gnosticism.

Irenaeus moved the Church in a positive direction by asserting the oneness of God, who is the Creator of heaven and earth. His commitment to monotheism protected the Church from taking a wrong turn in the maze and consequently arriving at a polytheistic dead end. Irenaeus also cautioned

<sup>32</sup>Later referred to as *hypostasis*, as defined at Chalcedon, 451.

<sup>33</sup>Jack N. Sparks, *Saint Irenaeus' The Preaching of the Apostles* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1987), 11.

<sup>34</sup>From Gk. *gnōsis*, "knowledge." The Gnostics used a dualistic approach to reality, wherein they believed that spirit is good and matter is evil. They taught that humanity has been enslaved because "the powers" have kept a tremendous cosmic secret from them. This secret knowledge was available through the Gnostic teachers. In the Gnostic viewpoint, the Creator God was defiled because He had corrupted himself by creating material things, such as the earth itself and human beings. Through *gnōsis* a human being could transcend the Creator God by moving through spiritual spheres called emanations, and thereby relate to the high God, who is far above the corruptions of matter.

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against Gnostic speculation concerning the manner in which the Son was begotten by the **Father**.<sup>35</sup>

The Gnostics continually speculated about the nature of Christ and His relation to the Father. Some Gnostics ranked Christ with their pantheon of aeons (spiritual intermediaries between the Divine Mind and earth), and in this, they trivialized His deity. Others ( **Docetists**)<sup>36</sup> denied the full humanity of Christ, insisting that He could not have been incarnate, but rather He only appeared to be a man and to suffer and die on the cross (cf. John 1: 14; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 4:2-3).

Irenaeus passionately countered the teachings of the **Gnostics** with an impressively developed Christology, emphasizing both the full humanity and deity of Jesus Christ. In his defense of Christology, Irenaeus answered the Gnostics with two crucial sentences that would later emerge at **Chalcedon**:<sup>37</sup> "*Filius dei filius hominis factus, 'The Son of God [has] become a son of man,' and 'Jesus Christus vere homo, vere deus, 'Jesus Christ, true man and true God.'*"<sup>38</sup>

This necessitated a rudimentary concept of Trinitarianism. Otherwise, the alternative would have been ditheism (two gods) or polytheism (many gods). However, Irenaeus is said to have implied an "economic trinitarianism." In other words, "He only deals with the deity of the Son and the Spirit in the context of their revelation and saving activity, i.e., in the context of the 'economy' (plan) of **salvation**."<sup>39</sup>

## TERTULLIAN AGAINST PRAXEAS

Tertullian, the "Pentecostal Bishop of Carthage" ( 160–ca. 230), made inestimable contributions to the development of Trinitarian orthodoxy. Adolph Harnack, for example, insists it was Tertullian who broke ground for the subsequent development of the orthodox Trinitarian **doctrine**.<sup>40</sup>

Tertullian's tract "Against Praxeas" is a brief fifty pages of

<sup>35</sup>Brown, *Heresies*, 84.

<sup>36</sup>From Gk. *dokeō*, "to seem or have the appearance of."

<sup>37</sup>In what is now northwest Turkey.

<sup>38</sup>Brown, *Heresies*, 84.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>*Sitzungsberichte der königlich preussischen akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, June, 1895, 595. In Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, Publishers, reprint 1970), 5-6.

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vigorous polemic against one Praxeas who is supposed to be the importer of the heresy of Monarchianism or **Patripassianism** into **Rome**.<sup>41</sup> Monarchianism teaches the existence of one solitary Monarch, God. By implication, the full deity of the Son and the Spirit are denied. However, to preserve the **doctrines** of salvation, the Monarchians concluded that the Father, as deity, was necessarily crucified for the sins of the world. This is the heresy called Patripassianism. Therefore, Tertullian said of Praxeas, "He had expelled prophecy and brought in heresy, had exiled the Paraclete and crucified the **Father**."<sup>42</sup>

As the heresy of Praxeas passed through the Church, **Tertullian** informs us that the people slept in their doctrinal simplicity.<sup>43</sup> Although he was determined to warn the Church of the dangers of Monarchianism, he entered the controversy at the eleventh hour, when the heresy was fast becoming dominant in the thinking of Christians.

It became Tertullian's task to dig an orthodox channel for the inherent implications of Trinitarian theology in the consciousness of the Church to flow into. Although Tertullian is accredited as the first to use the term "Trinity," it is not correct to say that he "invented" the doctrine, but rather that he mined the consciousness of the Church and exposed the inherent vein of Trinitarian thought already present. B. B. **Warfield** comments, "Tertullian had to ... establish the true and complete deity of Jesus ... without creating two Gods. ... And so far as Tertullian succeeded in it, he must be recognized as the father of the Church doctrine of the Trinity."<sup>44</sup>

Tertullian explicates the concept of an "economic Trinity" (similar to Irenaeus' concept, but with more explicit definition). He emphasizes God's unity, that is, there is only one divine substance, one divine power-without separation, division, dispersion, or diversity-and yet there is a distribution of functions, a distinction of persons.

<sup>41</sup>Praxeas was probably an earlier representative of the heresy that **Tertullian**, later, was so concerned about exposing and defeating.

<sup>42</sup>Benjamin B. Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), 7.

<sup>43</sup>Tertullian later joined the Montanists, some of whom were not as heretical as their opponents claimed. See, however, Brown, *Heresies*, 66-68.

<sup>44</sup>Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian*, 24.

## ORIGEN AND THE ALEXANDRIAN SCHOOL

In the second century B.C., Alexandria, Egypt, replaced Athens as the intellectual center of the Greco-Roman world. Christian academia later flourished at Alexandria. Some of the greatest scholars in the early history of the Church were of the Alexandrian School.

The Church progressed further through the theological maze of doctrinal formulation with the work of the celebrated Alexandrian theologian, Origen (ca. 185–254). The **eternality** of the personal *Logos* was explicated for the first time in Origen's **thought**.<sup>45</sup> With Origen, the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity began to emerge, though it was not crystallized in its formulation (progressing beyond Tertullian's "economic" concept) until the end of the fourth century at the Council of Nicaea (325).

In opposition to the Monarchians (also called Unitarians), Origen propounded his doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son (referred to as **filiation**). He attached this generating to the will of the Father, therefore implying the subordination of the Son to the Father. The doctrine of **filiation** was suggested to him, not only by the designations "Father" and "Son," but also by the fact that the Son is consistently called "the only begotten" (John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 John 4:9).<sup>46</sup>

According to Origen, the Father eternally begets the Son and is therefore never without Him. The Son is God and yet He **subsists** (to use later theological language having to do with God's being) as a distinct Person from the Father. Origen's concept of eternal generation prepared the Church for its future understanding of the Trinity as **subsisting in three** Persons, rather than consisting of three parts.

Origen gave theological expression to the relation of the Son to the Father, later affirmed at the Council of Nicaea, as being *homoousios to patri*, "of one substance [or essence]

<sup>45</sup>Origen was a prolific writer who dealt with virtually every aspect of Christianity. Although he contributed significantly to the development of Trinitarian theology, he was given to eccentric extremes. Three centuries after his martyrdom, Origen was posthumously condemned as a heretic by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553). See Brown, *Heresies*, 88.

<sup>46</sup>John refers to the *Logos* as the "One and Only" (John 1:14,18). The Greek word *monogenēs* was used of Isaac (Deb. 11:17), even though Abraham had other sons. Therefore, the scriptural meaning of the word is "only" in the sense of "unique," "special," "one-of-a-kind" and implies a special love (Gen. 22:2). It is used of Jesus to emphasize that He is by nature the Son of God in a unique, special sense that no one else is or can be.

with the **Father**.<sup>47</sup> The understanding of personhood, essential to the orthodox Trinitarian formula, was still lacking in precision. The Latin expression *persona*, meaning "role" or "actor," did not help in the theological struggle to understand the Father, Son, and Spirit as three Persons instead of merely different roles acted out by God. The **theological** concept of **hypostases**, that is, the distinction of Persons within the Godhead (in distinction to the unity of substance or nature within the Godhead, referred to as "consubstantiality" and relating to *homoousia*), allowed for the paradoxical formulation of Trinitarian theology.

Origen's doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son was a polemic against the notion that there was a time when the Son was not. His concept of "consubstantiality" stressed the equality of the Son with the Father. However, difficulties surfaced in Origen's thought because of the concept of subordination presented in the language of the New Testament and the idea of the submissive role of the Son to the Father while still maintaining the Son's full deity. Critical for our comprehension "is to understand the subordination in what we may call an economic sense," not in a sense that is related to the nature of God's being. Therefore, "The Son submits to the will of the Father and executes his plan (*oikonomia*), but he is not therefore inferior in nature to the **Father**."<sup>48</sup>

Origen was inconsistent in his formulation of the relationship between the Father and the Son, at times presenting the Son as a kind of second-order deity, distinguished from the Father as to person but inferior as to being. Origen essentially taught that the Son owed His existence to the will of the Father. This vacillation concerning the concept of **subordinationism** provoked a massive reaction from the Monarchians.

## DYNAMIC MONARCHIANISM: THE FIRST WRONG TURN

The Monarchians sought to preserve the concept of the oneness of God, the monarchy of monotheism. They focused on the **eternality** of God, as the one Lord or Ruler, in relation to His creation.

Monarchianism appeared in two separate strains: Dynamic and **Modalistic**. Dynamic Monarchianism (also called Ebionite

<sup>47</sup>Origen probably proposed the word *homoousios*, for this term appears in the Latin text of Origen's *Commentary on Hebrews*. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* 2d. ed. (London: Longmans, 1960), 215, 245.

<sup>48</sup>Brown, *Heresies*, 91.



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Monarchianism, Unitarian Monarchianism, or Adoptionist Monarchianism) preceded Modalistic Monarchianism.

Dynamic Monarchianism denied any notion of an eternally personal Trinity. The Dynamic Monarchian School was represented by the **Alogi**,<sup>49</sup> men who rejected **Logos** Christology. The Alogi based their Christology on the Synoptic Gospels only, refusing to accept John's Christology because of their suspicions of Hellenistic intrusions in the prologue of his Gospel.

Dynamic Monarchians contended that Christ was not God from all eternity, but rather, He became God at a point in time. Although differences of opinion existed as to the particular time appointed for the deification of the Son, the widespread opinion was that the Son's exaltation took place at His baptism when He was anointed by the Spirit. Christ, then, through His obedience, became the divine Son of God. Christ was considered the adopted Son of God, rather than the eternal Son of God.

Dynamic Monarchianism also taught that Jesus was exalted progressively, or dynamically, to the status of Godhood. The relation of the Father to the Son was perceived not in terms of their nature and being but in moral terms. That is, the Son was not regarded as possessing equality of nature with the Father (*homoousios*: *homo* means "same" and *ousios* means "essence"). Dynamic Monarchians proposed that there is merely a moral relation between Jesus and the purposes of God.<sup>50</sup>

An early advocate of Dynamic Monarchianism was the third century bishop of Antioch, Samosata. A great debate developed between the Eastern Church and the Antiochan School on one side, and the Western Church and the Alexandrian School on the other. The focus of the debate was the relation between the **Logos** and the man Jesus.

Harold O. J. Brown observes that Dynamic **Monarchianism's** "adoptionism preserved the unity of the godhead by

<sup>49</sup>I.e., u-"without," *logi*—"word."

<sup>50</sup>Modern forms of Dynamic Monarchianism have been represented in the work of the nineteenth-century theologian Friedrich **Schleiermacher**, who thought of Jesus as the greatest example of God-consciousness. Albrecht Ritschl, in the same century, focused on the virtues of Jesus, defining His nature by the perfect sense of duty revealed in Jesus' life. In the twentieth century, the Anglican John A. T. Robinson asserted that Jesus was "the man for others," stressing that Christ was the most outstanding example of godly characteristics in history.

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sacrificing the deity of **Christ**."<sup>51</sup> Dynamic Monarchianism is, therefore, a wrong turn in the doctrinal maze, ending in a heretical dead end.

**Lucian** followed Samosata as the champion of Dynamic Monarchianism. Lucian's prize pupil was Arius. He was behind the Arian controversy that resulted in the convening of bishops at Nicaea and the drafting of the great Trinitarian Creed (325). But before discussing Arianism, let us examine the second strain of Monarchianism: Modalism.

**MODALISTIC MONARCHIANISM: THE SECOND WRONG TURN**

The principal influences behind Modalistic Monarchianism were Gnosticism and **Neoplatonism**.<sup>52</sup> Modalistic **Monarchians** conceived of the universe as one organized whole, manifest in a hierarchy of modes. The modes (likened to concentric circles) were conceived of as various levels of manifestations of reality emanating from God, "The One" who exists in "pure being," as the Supreme Being at the top of the hierarchical scale. (This shows Neoplatonic influence.)

Modalistic Monarchians taught that reality decreases the farther an emanation is from The One. Therefore, the lowest order of being would be the physical matter of the universe. Although matter was still considered to be a part of The One from which it emanates, Modalists considered it to exist in a lower form. (This shows the Gnostic influence.) Conversely, reality was thought to increase as one progresses toward The One (also referred to as Divine Mind).

It is easy to see the pantheistic implications of this view of reality, since everything in existence is supposed to originate from the emanations (modes or levels of reality) from God's own essence. Some Modalists used an analogy of the sun and its rays. Sun rays are of the same essence as the sun, but they are not the sun. The **Modalists** supposed that the farther the rays are from the sun, the less they are pure sunlight, and that although the rays share the same essence as the sun, they are inferior to the sun, being mere projections of it.

The Christological application of this worldview identified Jesus as a first-order emanation from the Father, reducing Him

<sup>51</sup>Brown, *Heresies*, 99.

<sup>52</sup>Plotinus and others modified Plato's teachings and conceived of the world as an emanation from The One, with whom the soul could be reunited in some sort of trance or ecstasy.

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to a level below the Father with respect to the nature of His being, or essence. Although Jesus was considered the highest order of being apart from The One, He was still inferior to The One and dependent for His existence on the Father, even though He was superior to angels and humankind.

Sabellius (third century) was the champion of Modalistic Monarchianism, responsible for its most formidable impression on the Church. He originated the above analogy of the sun and its rays, and denied that Jesus is deity in the eternal sense that the Father is. This idea led to the theological term *homoiousios*. The prefix, *homoī*, means “like” or “similar” and the root, *ousios*, means “essence.” Therefore, Sabellius contended that the Son’s nature was only like the Father’s; it was not the same as the Father’s.

Sabellius was condemned as a heretic in 268 at the Council of Antioch. The difference between *homo* (“same”) and *homoi* (“similar”) may appear trivial, but the *iota* (“i”) is the difference between the pantheistic implications of Sabellianism (i.e., the confusing of God with His creation) and the full deity of Jesus Christ, apart from which, doctrines of salvation are gravely affected. Through this abandonment of the full deity and personhood of Christ and the Holy Spirit, Modalistic Monarchianism took a wrong turn in the doctrinal maze as well.

## ARIANISM: THE THIRD WRONG TURN

Although a student of **Lucian** and, consequently, in the line of the Dynamic Monarchianism heralded by Paul of Samosata, Arius went beyond them in theological complexity. He was raised in Alexandria, where he was ordained a presbyter shortly after A.D. 311, even though he was a disciple of the Antiochan tradition. Around 318, he aroused the attention of Alexander, the new archbishop of Alexandria. Alexander excommunicated him in 321 for his heretical views concerning the person, nature, and work of Jesus Christ.

Arius was determined to be restored to the church, not in repentance, but to the end that his views of Christ might become the theology of the church. In his efforts to be restored to the church, he enlisted the aid of some of his more influential friends, including Eusebius of Nicomedia and the renowned church historian Eusebius of Caesarea, as well as several Asian bishops. He continued to teach without Alexander’s approval, and his speculations stirred up considerable debate and confusion within the church.

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Soon after Arius’ excommunication, Constantine became sole emperor of the Roman Empire. Constantine discovered, to his great dismay, that the church was in such chaos over the Arian controversy that it was threatening the political and religious stability of the entire empire. He hastened to summon the First Ecumenical Council, the Nicaean Council, in 325.

Arius stressed that God the Father alone is the sole Monarch and therefore eternal. God is “unbegotten” and everything else, including Christ, is “begotten.” Arius wrongly asserted that the idea of being “begotten” conveys the concept of having been created.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, he took pains to separate himself from the pantheistic implications of the **Sabellian** heresy by insisting that there was no internal necessity for God to create. He also said God created an independent substance (Lat. *substantia*), which He used to create all other things. This independent substance, first created by God above all other things, was the Son.

Arius proposed that the Son’s uniqueness is limited to His having been the first and greatest creation of God. The incarnation of the Son is conceived, in Arian thought, as the union of the created substance (the **Logos**) with a human body. He taught that the **Logos** replaced the soul within the human body of Jesus of **Nazareth**.<sup>54</sup>

Harnack is correct in his observation that Arius “is a strict monotheist only with respect to cosmology; as a theologian, he is a polytheist.”<sup>55</sup> Arius, in other words, acknowledged only one solitary Person as God; however, in practice he extended worship reserved for God alone to Christ, whom he otherwise said had a beginning.

Arius’ Christology reduced Christ to a creature and, consequently, denied Christ’s saving work. Arianism thereby took a wrong turn in the maze, down a heretical corridor from which there is no exit.

<sup>53</sup>See footnote 46.

<sup>54</sup>Apollinaris, the younger, of Laodicea (d. ca. 390) extended the idea that the **Logos** replaced the human soul in Jesus Christ. The problem with this view is that in replacing a human soul with a spiritual entity, the **Logos**, Christ is not true humanity. Apollinaris understood “flesh” (John 1:14) to mean “physical body” instead of “human nature,” which is the common meaning in the New Testament.

<sup>55</sup>Quoted in Brown, *Heresties*, 115.

## CHAPTER 5 TRINITARIAN ORTHODOXY: EXITING THE MAZE

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Three hundred bishops from both the Western (Alexandrian) and the Eastern (Antiochan) Church convened in **Nicaea**<sup>56</sup> for the great ecumenical council that would attempt to bring theological precision to the doctrine of the Trinity. The council's concern was threefold: (1) to **clarify** terms used to articulate the Trinitarian doctrine; (2) to expose and condemn theological errors that were present in various parts of the Church; and (3) to draft a document that would adequately address the convictions identified in Holy Scripture and shared by the consensus of the Church.

Bishop Alexander was poised for battle with Arius. The Arians were confident that they would be victorious. Eusebius of Nicomedia prepared a document declaring the faith of the Arians, and it was proposed confidently at the very outset of the council. Because it boldly denied the deity of Christ, it provoked the indignation of the majority of those in attendance. They soundly rejected the document. Then Eusebius of Caesarea (who was not an Arian even though he was a representative of the Eastern Church) drafted a creed during the debate which later became the blueprint for the Nicene Creed.

Bishop Alexander (and the Alexandrians in general) was principally concerned with how Arius' views would **affect** one's personal salvation if Christ were not fully God in the same sense that the Father is. To bring man into reconciliation with God, contended Alexander, Christ must be God.

Bishop Alexander acknowledged the language of subordination in the New Testament, particularly the references to Jesus as being "begotten" of the Father. He indicated that the term "begotten" must be understood from a Jewish perspective, since Hebrews were the ones using the term in the Bible. The Hebrew usage of the term is for the purpose of setting forth the preeminence of Christ. (Paul speaks in these terms, using the word "firstborn," not in reference to Christ's origin but to the salvatory effects of His redemptive work [see Col. 1:15,18].)<sup>57</sup>

Alexander answered Arius by contending that the Son's begottenness is preceded in Scripture by the predicate *para* in John 1:14 (the Word is the only begotten from the Father), indicating a sharing of the same eternal nature as God (in

<sup>56</sup>Modern Nice in southeast France.

<sup>57</sup>See footnote 46.

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line with Origen's "eternal generation" of the Son).<sup>58</sup> In the ears of the intractable Arius, this amounted to an admission of Christ's creation. He was desperately trying to rid theology of Modalistic implications which, to use the later words assigned to his archenemy, Athanasius, were guilty of "confusing the **persons**."<sup>59</sup> Therefore, it was crucial to distinguish Christ from the Father.

Bishop Alexander pressed on, claiming that Christ is "generated" by the Father, but not in the sense of emanation or creation. Theologically, the great challenge before the Western Church was the explanation of the concept of *homoousia* without falling into the error of Modalistic heresy.

Athanasius is generally credited with being the great defender of the faith at the Council of Nicaea. However, the weight of Athanasius' work actually followed that great ecumenical council.

The inflexible Athanasius, though deposed by the emperor on three occasions during his own ecclesiastical career, fearlessly contended for the concept of Christ's being of the same essence (*homoousios*) as the Father, not merely like the Father in essence (*homoiousios*). During his career as bishop and defender of what emerged as orthodoxy, it was "Athanasius against the world."

The Alexandrian School finally triumphed over the Arians, and Arius was once again condemned and excommunicated. In the **creedal** formulation of the Trinity doctrine at Nicaea, Jesus Christ is "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the **Father**."<sup>60</sup>

The Church would later use the term "procession" in place of "generation" or "begotten," for the purpose of expressing the Son's economic subordination to the Father: The Son *proceeds* from the Father. A kind of primacy is still assigned to the Father in relation to the Son, but that primacy is not a primacy of time; the Son has always existed as the Word.

<sup>58</sup>See Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, reprint, 1976), 476-77, for an explanation of John's use of the predicate *para* with the genitive, indicative here of Christ's mutual possession of God's eternal nature.

<sup>59</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964), 18.

<sup>60</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* 2d ed. (London: Longmans, 1960), 315.

However, He has “generated” or “proceeded” from the Father, not the Father from the Son.

This procession of the Son (by the eighth century, referred to as “**filiation**”) is understood theologically to be a necessary act of the Father’s will, thereby making it impossible to conceive of the Son as not generating from the Father. Hence, the procession of the Son is an eternal present, an always continuing, never ending act. The Son is therefore immutable (not subject to change; Heb. 13:8) even as the Father is immutable (Mal. 3:6). *The* filiation of the Son is definitely not a generation of His divine essence, for the Father and the Son are both Deity and therefore of the “same” indivisible nature.<sup>61</sup> The Father and the Son (with the Spirit) exist together in personal subsistence (i.e., the Son and the Spirit are personally distinct from the Father in their eternal existence).

Although this exposition of the acute linguistic complexities of the Nicene Creed may be frustrating at a distance of sixteen centuries, it is important for us to consider again the crucial need to maintain the paradoxical formula of the Athanasian Creed, “One God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.” Theological precision is critical, for the terms *ousia*, *bupostasis*, *substantia*, and *subsistence* provide us with a conceptual understanding of what is meant by Trinitarian orthodoxy, as in the Athanasian Creed: “The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.”

During the years 361-81, Trinitarian orthodoxy underwent further refinement, particularly concerning the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. In 381, at Constantinople, the bishops were summoned by Emperor Theodosius, and the statements of Nicene orthodoxy were reaffirmed. Also, there was explicit citation concerning the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Nice-Constantinopolitan Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit in terms of deity as “the Lord and life-giver, who **proceeds**<sup>[62]</sup> from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is **coworshiped** and coglorified, who spoke through the **prophets**.”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup>That is, *homousios*; essence or substance; Lat. *substantia*; Gk. *bupostasis*. In contradistinction to *ousia*, however, Greek theological language uses *bupostasis* to mean “individual personal reality.”

<sup>62</sup>The term *filioque* was used of the Spirit as analogous to the “filiation” of the Son.

<sup>63</sup>The Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20) and also as the Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6). The sending of the Spirit (i.e., the Spirit’s *filioque*) is ascribed to both the Father and the Son (John 14: 16;

*The* title “Lord” (Gk. *kurios*), used in Scripture within certain outstanding contexts to ascribe deity, is assigned here (in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed) to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, He who proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 15:26) personally subsists from eternity within the Godhead, without division or change as to His nature (i.e., He is essentially *homousios* with the Father and the Son).

The personal properties (i.e., the inner workings of each Person within the Godhead) assigned each of the three members of the Trinity are then understood as follows: to the Father, ingenerateness; to the Son, begottenness; and to the Holy Spirit, procession. Insistence on these personal properties is not an attempt to explain the Trinity, but to distinguish Trinitarian orthodoxy from heretical **Modalistic** formulas.

The distinctions among the three members of the Godhead do not refer to their essence or substance, but to their relationships. In other words, the order of existence in the Trinity, with respect to God’s essential being, is mirrored in the economic Trinity. “There are thus three, not in status, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in its **manifestation**.”<sup>64</sup>

The enduring process of inquiry into the nature of the living God here gives way to worship. With the apostles, the church fathers, the martyrs, and the greatest of the theologians throughout the ages of church history, we must acknowledge that “all good theology ends with doxology” (cf. Rom. 11:33–36). Consider this classic hymn of Reginald Heber:

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!  
All Thy works shall praise Thy name  
In earth, and sky, and sea;

15:26; 16:7,13–14). The *filioque* was added to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed by the Synod of Toledo in 589. However, the Eastern Church protested the *filioque* of the Spirit from both the Father and the Son (contending rather that the Spirit proceeded from the Father only) because the Western doctrine appeared to subordinate the Third Person of the Trinity to the concrete, historically revealed, incarnate Jesus. Further, the Western doctrine appeared to elevate the historical, objective Christ Jesus to a status comparable to the Father, making the Spirit inferior to both. By 1017, the *filioque* was **officially** established in the West. Photius of Constantinople had rejected the doctrine in the ninth century and the concerns of the East finally resulted in the rupture between the East and the West in 1054.

“Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 157.

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TrinityHoly, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

## TRINITY AND THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Non-Trinitarian views, such as Modalism and Arianism, reduce the doctrine of salvation to a divine charade. All of the basic Christian convictions centering on the work of the Cross presuppose the personal distinction of the three members of the Trinity. In reflection, one may ask whether it is necessary to believe in the doctrine of the Trinity to be saved. In response, historically and theologically, the Church has not usually required an explicit declaration of faith in the doctrine of the Trinity for salvation. Rather, the Church has expected an implicit faith in the triune God as essential to one's relating to the distinctive roles of each of the divine Persons in the Godhead in the redemptive work in behalf of humanity.

The doctrine of salvation (including reconciliation, propitiation, ransom, justification, and expiation) is contingent upon the cooperation of the distinctive members of the triune God (e.g., Eph. 1:3–14). Therefore, a conscious renouncing of the Trinity doctrine seriously jeopardizes the hope of one's personal salvation. Scripture indicts all humankind under the universal condemnation of sin (Rom. 3:23), and therefore, everyone is in "need of salvation; the doctrine of salvation requires an adequate Savior, i.e., an adequate Christology. A sound Christology requires a satisfactory concept of God, i.e., a sound special theology-which brings us back to the doctrine of the **Trinity**."<sup>65</sup>

The **Modalistic** view of the nature of God abolishes Christ's mediatorial work between God and people altogether. Reconciliation (2 Cor. 5: 1 8–2 1) implies the setting aside of enmity or opposition. Whose enmity is set aside? The Scriptures reveal that God is at enmity with sinners (Rom. 5:9), and in their sin, people also are at enmity with God (Rom. 3:10–18; 5:10).

*The* triune God is explicitly revealed in the Bible in the redemption and reconciliation of sinners to God. God "sends" the Son into the world (John 3:16–17). In the shadow of Calvary, Jesus obediently submits to the will of the Father, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I *will*, but as you *will*!" (Matt. 26:39). *The* subject-object relationship between the Father and the Son is clearly

<sup>65</sup>Brown, *Heresies*, 154.CHAPTER  
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evident here. The Son bears the shame of the cursed **tree**,<sup>66</sup> making peace (reconciliation) between God and humankind (Rom. 5: 1; Eph. 2: 13–1 6). As life quickly drains from His body, Jesus looks to the heavens from the cross and utters His final words, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Unless two distinct persons are revealed here in the redemptive act of the Cross, then this event becomes merely the divine charade of one neurotic Christ.

In Modalism, the concept of Christ's death as an infinite satisfaction is lost. The blood of Christ is the sacrifice for our sins (1 John 2:2). The doctrine of propitiation connotes appeasement, the averting of wrath by means of an acceptable **sacrifice**.<sup>67</sup> Christ is God's sacrificial Lamb (John 1:29). Because of Christ, God's mercy is extended to us in place of the wrath we deserve as sinners. However, to suggest, as Modalism does, that God is one person and makes himself a sin offering to himself, being at the same time wrathful and merciful, makes Him seem capricious. In other words, the Cross would be a senseless act as far as the concept of a sin offering is concerned: Whose wrath would Christ be averting?

The apostle John identifies Jesus as our Paraclete (Helper or Counselor), "One who speaks to the Father in our defense" (1 John 2: 1). This requires a Judge who is distinct from Jesus himself before He can fulfill such a role. Because Christ is our Paraclete, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). We therefore have full assurance of our salvation because Christ, our Helper, is also our Sin Offering.

Jesus came into the world not "to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The concept of a ransom and its cognates in Scripture is used with reference to a payment that ensures the liberation of prisoners. To whom did Christ pay the ransom? If the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is denied, disallowing a distinction of Persons in the Godhead (as is the case with Modalism), then Christ would have had to have paid the ransom either to people or to Satan. Since humanity is dead in transgressions and sins (Eph. 2:1), no human being is in a position to hold Christ for ransom. This would leave Satan as the cosmic extortioner. However, we owe Satan nothing, and the notion of Satan holding humanity for ransom is blasphemous because

<sup>66</sup>The Hebrew word for tree, *'etz*, also means wood, timber, or anything made of wood, and therefore includes the cross.<sup>67</sup>See chap. 10, pp. 338, 344–46.

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of its dualistic implications (i.e., the idea that Satan possesses power **sufficient** to extort from Christ His very life; see John 10:15–18).

The ransom was instead paid to the triune God in satisfaction of the full claims of divine justice against the fallen sinner. Because of Modalism's rejection of Trinitarianism this heresy correspondingly perverts the concept of justification. Although deserving of God's **justice, we are** justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone (1 Cor. 6:11). Having been justified (i.e., having been pronounced not guilty before God) through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are then declared righteous before God (Rom. 4:5,25). Christ declares the Spirit is "another" Person distinct from himself and yet of the "same kind" (*allon*, John 14:16). The Holy Spirit applies the work of the Son in rebirth (Titus 3:5), sanctifies the believer (1 Cor. 6:11), and gives us access (Eph. 2:18) through our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:14–16), to be received into the Father's presence (2 Cor. 5:17–21).

A God who changes through successive modes is contrary to the revelation of God's unchanging nature (Mal. 3:6). Such Modalism is deficient with regard to salvation, denying Jesus Christ's high priestly position. Scripture declares that Christ is our divine Intercessor at the right hand of God, our Father (Heb. 7:23 through 8:2).

Clearly, the essential doctrine of the substitutionary Atonement, in which Christ bears our sins in His death before the Father, is dependent on the Trinitarian concept. Modalism subverts the biblical concept of Christ's penal, substitutionary death in satisfaction of God's justice, ultimately making the Cross of no effect.

The defective Christology of the Arian heresy places Arianism also under the summary condemnation of Holy Scripture. The relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is founded in their shared nature as deity, ultimately explained in terms of the Trinity. "No one who denies the Son," says John, "has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23). Proper acknowledgment of the Son requires belief in His deity, as well as in His humanity. Christ, as God, is able to satisfy the Father's justice; as Man, **He is** able to fulfill humanity's moral responsibility toward God. In the work of the Cross, God's justice and grace are revealed to us.<sup>68</sup> The eternal perfection of God and the sinful

<sup>68</sup>This argument is derived from the classic argument of Anselm, the archbishop of Canterbury, in the eleventh century, as recorded in his brilliant treatise *Cur Deus Homo?* ("Why God [as] Man?"), 2.8–10.

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imperfections of humanity are reconciled through the **God-Man**, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:11–13). The Arian heresy, in its denial of the full deity of Christ, is without God the Father (1 John 2:23) and therefore without any hope of eternal life.

## THE THEOPHILOSOPHICAL NECESSITY OF THE TRINITY

The eternal properties and absolute perfection of the triune God are critical to the Christian concept of God's sovereignty and creation. God, as Trinity, is complete in himself (i.e., sovereign), and, consequently, creation is a free act of God, not a necessary action of His being. For this reason, "before 'in the beginning' something other than a static situation existed."<sup>69</sup>

The Christian faith offers a clear, understandable revelation of God from outside the sphere of time, for God, as Trinity, has enjoyed eternal fellowship and communication among His three distinct Persons. The concept of a personal, communicative God from all eternity is rooted in Trinitarian theology. God did not exist in static silence only to one day choose to break the tranquility of that silence by speaking. Rather, the eternal communion within the Trinity is essential to the concept of revelation. (The alternative of a solitary divine Being who mutters to himself in His loneliness is a bit disquieting.) The triune God has revealed himself, personally and propositionally, to humankind in history.

The personality of God, as Trinity, is also the source and meaning of human personality. "Without such a source," observes Francis Schaeffer, "men are left with personality coming from the impersonal (plus time, plus chance)."<sup>70</sup>

Throughout eternity, the Father loved the Son, the Son loved the Father, and the Father and the Son loved the Spirit. "God is love" (1 John 4:16). Therefore, love is an eternal attribute. By definition, love is shared necessarily with another, and God's love is a self-giving love. Hence, the eternal love within the Trinity gives ultimate meaning to human love (1 John 4:17).

## EXCURSUS: ONENESS PENTECOSTALISM

At the Arroyo Seco World Wide Camp Meeting, near Los Angeles, in 1913, a controversy arose. During a baptismal

<sup>69</sup>Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, vol. 2, *Genesis in Space and Time* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1982), 8.

<sup>70</sup>Francis Schaeffer, *The Trilogy* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990), 283.

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service, Canadian evangelist R. E. **McAlister** contended that the apostles did not invoke the triune Name-Father, Son, and Holy **Spirit**—in baptism, but rather they baptized in the name of Jesus *only*.

During the night, John G. Schaepppe, an immigrant from Danzig, Germany, had a vision of Jesus and woke up the camp shouting that the name of Jesus needed to be glorified. Thereafter, Frank J. Ewart began teaching that those who had been baptized using the Trinitarian formula needed to be rebaptized in the name of Jesus “*only*.”<sup>71</sup> Others soon began spreading this “new **issue**.”<sup>72</sup> Along with this came an acceptance of one Person in the Godhead, acting in different modes or offices. The Arroyo **Seco** revival had helped **fire** this new issue.

In October 1916, the General Council of the Assemblies of God convened in St. Louis for the purpose of digging a doctrinal fire line around Trinitarian orthodoxy. The Oneness constituency was confronted by a majority who demanded of them to accept the Trinitarian baptismal formula and the orthodox doctrine of Christ or leave the Fellowship. About one-fourth of the ministers did withdraw. But the Assemblies of God established itself in the doctrinal tradition of “the faith preached by the Apostles, attested by the Martyrs, embodied in the Creeds, expounded by the **Fathers**,”<sup>73</sup> by contending for Trinitarian orthodoxy.

Typically, Oneness Pentecostalism states, “We do not believe in three separate personalities in the Godhead, but we believe in three offices which are filled by one **person**.”<sup>74</sup>

The Oneness (**Modalistic**) doctrine therefore conceives of God as one transcendent Monarch whose numerical unity is disrupted by three ongoing manifestations to humankind as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three faces of the one Monarch are actually divine imitations of Jesus, the personal expression of God through His incarnation. The idea of **personhood** is understood by Oneness Pentecostals to require

“Many, including **Myrtle** (Fisher) Horton, mother of the general editor, Dr. Stanley M. Horton, were told they would lose their salvation if they were not rebaptized.

<sup>72</sup>**These** included Andrew Urshan, T. **Haywood**, Glenn A. Cook, C. O. Opperman, George B. Studd, and Harvey Shearer.

<sup>73</sup>C. S. Lewis, God in *the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 90.

<sup>74</sup>**Nathaniel** A. Urshan, general superintendent of the United Pentecostal Church, International, quoted in *The “Jesus Only” or “Oneness” Pentecostal Movement* (San Juan Capistrano, Calif.: The Christian Research Institute, 1970).

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corporeality, and for this reason, Trinitarians are accused of embracing tritheism.

Because Jesus is “the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9, **KJV**), *the* Oneness Pentecostals contend that He is essentially the fullness of the undifferentiated Deity. In other words, they believe the threefold reality of God to be “three manifestations” of the one Spirit dwelling within the person of Jesus. They believe Jesus is the unipersonality of God whose “essence is revealed as Father *in the* Son and as Spirit *through the Son*.”<sup>75</sup> They explain further that Jesus’ divine pantomime is “Christocentric in that as a human being Jesus *is* the Son, and *as* Spirit (i.e., in his deity) he reveals—indeed *is* the Father—and sends—indeed *is the* Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ who indwells the **believer**.”<sup>76</sup>

We have argued that the third-century Sabellianism is heretical. In its similar denial of the eternal distinctions of the three Persons in the Godhead, Oneness Pentecostalism unwarily becomes entrapped in the same heretical corner of the theological maze as classical **Modalism**.<sup>77</sup> It *differs*, as stated before, in that Oneness Pentecostals conceive of the “trimanifestation” of God as simultaneous instead of successive, as is the case with classical Modalism. They contend that, based on Colossians 2:9, the concept of God’s **personhood** is reserved for the immanent and incarnate presence of Jesus only. Hence, Oneness Pentecostals generally argue that the Godhead is in Jesus, yet Jesus is not in the **Godhead**.<sup>78</sup>

Colossians 2:9 *affirms*, however, (as formulated at **Chalcedon** by the Church, 451) that Jesus is the “fullness of the revelation of God’s nature” (*theotētos*, deity) through His incarnation. All of God’s essence is embodied in Christ (He is full deity), though the three Persons are not simultaneously incarnate in Jesus.

Although Oneness Pentecostals confess the deity of Jesus Christ, they actually mean by this that as the Father, He is deity, and as the Son, He is humanity. In contending that the

<sup>75</sup>**David** A. Reed, “Oneness Pentecostalism” in *The Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess, Gary B. McGee, and Patrick Alexander (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 649.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup>**See** Calvin’s condemnation of the Unitarianism of his day in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 127.

<sup>78</sup>**Gordon** Magee, *Is Jesus in the Godhead or Is the Godhead in Jesus?* (Pasadena, Tex.: Gordon **Magee**, n.d.).

term "Son" is to be understood as the human nature of Jesus and that the term "Father" is the designation of Christ's divine nature, they imitate their anti-Trinitarian predecessors in their grave compromising of the doctrines of salvation.

Jesus did state, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). But this does not mean that Jesus and His Father are one Person, as contended by Oneness Pentecostals, for the Greek neuter hen ("one") is used by the apostle John instead of the masculine *heis*; therefore, essential unity is meant, not absolute **identity**.<sup>79</sup>

As has been stated, the subject-object distinction between the Father and the Son is revealed in bold scriptural relief as Jesus prays to the Father in His agony (Luke 22:42). Jesus also reveals and defends His identity by appealing to the Father's testimony (John 5:3 1-32). Jesus explicitly states, "There is another [Gk. *allos*] who testifies in my favor" (v. 32). Here, the term *allos* again connotes a **different** person from the one who is **speaking**.<sup>80</sup> Also in John 8: 16-18, Jesus says, "If I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." Jesus here quotes from the Old Testament law (Deut. 17:6; 19:15) for the purpose of again revealing His messianic identity (as subject) by appeal to His Father's witness (as object) to himself. To insist, as Oneness Pentecostals do, that the Father and the Son are numerically one would serve to discredit Jesus' witness of himself as Messiah.

Furthermore, Oneness Pentecostals teach that unless one is baptized "in the name of Jesus" only, then an individual is not truly saved.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, they imply that Trinitarians are not true Christians. In this they are actually guilty of adding works to God's revealed means of salvation by grace through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). Some sixty different references in the New Testament speak of salvation by grace through faith

<sup>79</sup>See R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 759-61. Note that in John 17:21 Jesus prays concerning His disciples, "that all of them may be one" [Gk. *hen*], which clearly does not mean His disciples were to lose their own personality and individuality.

<sup>80</sup>A different person of the same kind. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 39.

<sup>81</sup>Hank Hanegraaff, "Is The United Pentecostal Church a Christian Church?" (Perspective paper, Irvine, Calif.: The Christian Research Institute., n.d.)

alone apart from water baptism. If baptism is a necessary means to our salvation, then why isn't this point strongly emphasized in the New Testament? Instead, we find Paul saying, "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel-not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor. 1:17).

Additionally, it must be pointed out that the Book of Acts does not intend to prescribe a baptismal formula for the Church to use because the phrase "in the name of Jesus" does not occur exactly the same way twice in Acts.

In seeking to reconcile Jesus' command to baptize in "the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19) with Peter's statement "'be baptized ... in the name of Jesus Christ'" (Acts 2:38), we will consider three possible explanations.

1. Peter was disobedient to the clear commandment of his Lord. This, of course, is not an explanation at all and must be dismissed as ridiculous.

2. Jesus was speaking in cryptic terms, requiring some kind of mystical insight before one can clearly understand what He meant. In other words, He was **really** telling us to baptize only in the name of Jesus, though some fail to perceive this veiled intent of our Lord. However, there is simply no justification for drawing this conclusion. It is contrary to this particular genre of biblical literature (i.e., didactic-historical) and also, by implication at least, to the sinlessness of our Lord Jesus **Christ**.<sup>82</sup>

3. A better explanation is founded upon the apostolic authority in the Book of Acts, where the ministerial credentials of the apostles are concerned. When the phrase "in the name of Jesus Christ" is invoked by the apostles in Acts, it means "upon the authority of Jesus Christ" (cf. Matt. 28:18). For example, in Acts 3:6 the apostles heal by the authority of the name 'of Jesus Christ. In Acts 4, the apostles are summoned before the Sanhedrin to be interrogated concerning the mighty works they were doing: "By what power or what name did you do this?" (v. 7). The apostle Peter, filled anew with the Holy Spirit, stepped forward and boldly announced: "By the

<sup>82</sup>Some say that the singular word "name" in Matt. 28:19 means that Jesus is the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, the word is distributive, just as it is in the Hebrew of Ruth 1:2, where the singular "name" refers to both Mahlon and Chilion and does not confuse them. If the plural "names" had been used, the Bible would have had to have given more than one name each.



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name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, ... this man stands before you healed' " (v. 10). In Acts 16:18, the apostle Paul set a young woman free from demonic possession "in the name of Jesus Christ."

The apostles were baptizing, healing, performing deliverances, and preaching by the authority of Jesus Christ. As Paul said, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). Conclusively, the apostolic declaration "in the name of Jesus Christ" is then tantamount to saying "by the authority of Jesus Christ." Hence, there is no reason to believe that the apostles were disobedient to the Lord's imperative to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19), or that Jesus was being cryptic. Rather, even in the Book of Acts, the apostles baptized by the authority of Jesus Christ in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>83</sup>

The Trinity doctrine is the distinctive feature of God's revelation of himself in Holy Scripture. Let us then hold fast to our profession of one God, "eternally self-existent ... as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."<sup>84</sup>

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What does Christian theology mean when it speaks of mystery concerning the doctrine of the Trinity?
2. Discuss the tension between the concepts of unity and trinity in avoiding emphasizing one over the other in the doctrine of the Trinity.
3. What is the key to arriving at a truly biblical doctrine of the Trinity?
4. What is meant by an economic Trinity?
5. Discuss the significance of the massive conflict between the Eastern and Western Churches on the issue of the iota as distinguishing *homoousia* and *homoiousia*.

<sup>83</sup>A first-century document, the *Didachē* ("The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles"), supports this interpretation. The *Didachē* stresses that holy Communion is open only to those who have been baptized "into the name of the lord." Under the subheading "Baptism," the *Didachē* then asserts, "But concerning baptism ... baptize *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*." See J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 126.

<sup>84</sup>See the second article of faith in the Statement of Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God, Article V of the Constitution and Bylaws.

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6. What is the doctrine of *filioque* in relation to the Holy Spirit? (See footnotes 62 and 63.) Why did the Eastern Church oppose this doctrine?

7. In what ways is the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity essential to understanding our salvation?

8. How does Modalism corrupt the doctrines of salvation?

9. In what way is the doctrine of the Trinity critical to the concept of propositional revelation?

10. Is the insistence to baptize in the name of "Jesus only" by Oneness Pentecostals a significant issue? Why or why not?

**CHAPTER SIX**

# ***Created Spirit Beings***

***Carolyn Denise Baker  
Frank D. Macchia***

**ANGELS**

Although angels are mentioned in many places in the Bible, more frequently in the New Testament than in the Old, many would agree with Tim Unsworth, “Angels, it seems, are hard to pin down.” Nevertheless, an examination of these created beings can bring spiritual benefit.

One reason angels are “hard to pin down” is that the theology of angels is incidental to and not the primary focus of Scripture. Angelic contexts always have God or Christ as their focal point (Isa. 6:1–3; Rev. 4:7–11). Most angelic appearances are fleeting and without provocation or prediction. Such manifestations underscore truth; they never embody it. “When they are mentioned, it is always in order to inform us further about God, what he does, and how he does it”\*-as well as what He requires.

The Bible’s primary emphasis then is the Savior, not the servers; the God of angels, not the angels of God. Angels may be chosen as an occasional method for revelation, but they never constitute the message. The study of angels, however, can challenge the heart as well as the head. Although angels are mentioned a number of times in both the Old and New Testaments, “they are, if we may speak abruptly, none of our business most of the time. Our business is to learn to love

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<sup>\*</sup>Tim Unsworth, “Angels: A Short Visit with Our Heavenly Hosts,” *U.S. Catholic* 55 (March 1990): 31.

<sup>\*</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 434.

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God and our neighbor. Charity. Sanctity. There is our whole work cut out for us.”<sup>3</sup>

The old scholastic question which doubles as an exercise in logic, i.e., How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? is actually irrelevant, for it does not transform one’s character.” But the study of angels can encourage Christian graces such as these:

1. Humility. Angels are beings near to God, yet they serve believers most often in unseen, sometimes unknown ways. They are pure examples of humble service, seeking only the glory of God and the good of others. They embody what the Christian’s service can be.

2. **Confidence**, security, and a sense of calm. In times of desperation, God assigns these powerful beings to assist the weakest of believers. Because of this, tranquility and confidence can characterize our Christian living.

3. Christian responsibility. Both God and angels witness the Christian’s most unholy actions (**1 Cor. 4:9**). What a cause for believers to behave in a worthy manner!

4. Healthy optimism. Defying the evil one himself, good angels **chose**—and still choose—to serve God’s holy purpose. Consequently, their example makes devoted service to a perfect God in this imperfect universe plausible. In a future day angels will mediate the banishing of all who are evil (Matt. 13:41–42, 49–50). This encourages healthy optimism in the midst of all life’s situations.

5. A proper Christian self-concept. Men and women are created a “little lower than the heavenly beings” (Ps. 8:5). Yet, in Christ, redeemed humanity is elevated far above these magnificent servants of God and His people (Eph. 1:3–12).

6. A reverential awe. Men like Isaiah and Peter, and women like Hannah and Mary, **all** “recognized holiness when it appeared in angelic form, and their reaction was **appropriate**.”<sup>4</sup>

7. Participation in salvation history. God used angels in sacred history, especially Michael and Gabriel, to prepare for the Messiah. Later, angels proclaimed and worshiped Christ

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Howard, “The Parts Angels Play,” *Christianity Today* 24 (12 December 1980): 20.

<sup>4</sup>Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1947), 443. Herbert Muschamp in “Angels,” *Vogue* 179 (December 1989): 278, says this question may seem “the very symbol of scholastic absurdity,” but to the scholastics it was a sincere question. Angels were “like protons and electrons [functioning] as a binding force of the universe.”

<sup>5</sup>Howard, “Angels,” 20.

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in devoted service. A proper understanding of them will lead believers to do the same.

Where there is experience with angels today, however, the teaching of Scripture must interpret that experience. When the angel Gabriel appeared he brought a message that glorified God. But the claims of Joseph Smith with respect to the visitation of angels led directly into paths of **error**.<sup>6</sup>

The study of angels is a vital part of theology, having tangential value and implications for other teachings of the Bible: for example, the nature of God’s inspired Word, since angels mediated the Law to Moses (Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2);<sup>7</sup> the nature of God, since angels attend the holy God of the universe; and the nature of Christ and the end **times**,<sup>8</sup> since angels are included in the events of both Christ’s first and second comings.

## THE VIEW OF ANGELS THROUGH HISTORY

In pagan traditions (some of which influenced later Jews), angels were sometimes considered divine, sometimes natural phenomena. They were beings who did good deeds for people, or they were the people themselves who did good deeds. This confusion is reflected in the fact that both the Hebrew word *mal’akh* and the Greek word *angelos* have two meanings. The basic meaning of each is “messenger,” but that messenger, depending on the context, can be an ordinary human messenger or a heavenly messenger, an angel.

Some, on the basis of evolutionary philosophy, date the idea of angels to the beginning of civilization. “The concept of angels may have evolved from prehistoric times when primitive humans emerged from the cave and started looking up to the sky ... God’s voice was no longer the growl of the jungle but the roar of the **sky**.”<sup>9</sup> This supposedly developed into a view of angels serving humanity as God’s mediators.

<sup>6</sup>See *The Book of Mormon; Doctrine and the Covenants; The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, 1986), 20:10; 27:16. Supposedly an angel named Moroni appeared to Mormonism’s founder, Joseph Smith, and revealed the location of gold tablets (supposedly inscribed with the Book of Mormon) beneath the hill of Cumorah. Mormonism also erroneously advocates a special “gift given to behold angels and ministering spirits,” *Doctrine and Covenants*, Index, 13.

<sup>7</sup>Probably a reference to the “holy ones” of Deut. 33:2.

<sup>8</sup>Robert P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology: A Survey and Review* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 129.

<sup>9</sup>Unsworth, “Angels,” 30.

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True knowledge of angels, however, came only through divine revelation.

Later, Assyrians and Greeks attached wings to some semi-divine beings. Hermes had wings on his heels. Eros, “the fast-flying spirit of passionate love,” had them **affixed** to his shoulders. Adding a playful notion, the Romans invented Cupid, the god of erotic love, pictured as a playful boy shooting invisible love arrows to encourage humanity’s **romances**.<sup>10</sup> Plato (ca. 427-347 B.C.) also spoke of helpful guardian angels.

The Hebrew Scriptures give names to only two of the angels it mentions: Gabriel, who enlightened Daniel’s understanding (Dan. 9:21–27), and the archangel Michael, the protector of Israel (Dan. 12:1).

Nonbiblical Jewish apocalyptic literature, such as **Enoch** (105-64 B.C.), also recognizes that angels assisted the giving of the Mosaic law. The apocryphal book **Tobit** (200-250 B.C.), however, fabricated an archangel named Raphael who repeatedly helped **Tobit** in **difficult** situations. Actually, there is only one archangel (chief angel), Michael (Jude 9). Still later, **Philo** (ca. 20 B.C. to ca. A.D. 42), the Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, Egypt, depicted angels as mediators between God and humanity. Angels, subordinate creatures, lodged in the air as “the servants of God’s powers. [They were] incorporeal souls ... wholly intelligent throughout ... [having] pure **thoughts**.”<sup>11</sup>

During the New Testament period Pharisees believed angels were supernatural **beings** who often communicated **God’s** will (Acts 23:8). However, the **Sadducees**, influenced by Greek philosophy, said there was “neither resurrection, angel, nor spirit” (Acts 23:8, **KJV**). To them, angels were little more than “good thoughts and motions” of the human **heart**.<sup>12</sup>

During the **first** few centuries after Christ, church fathers said little about angels. Most of their attention was given to other subjects, especially to the nature of Christ. Still, all of

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>James Drummond, *Philo Judaeus: Or the Jewish Alexandrian Philosophy in Its Development and Completion*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1888), 146. For bibliography on Philo’s view of angels see Roberto Radice and David T. Runia, *Philo Judaeus: Or the Jewish Alexandrian Philosophy in Its Development and Completion* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1988); and William S. Babcock, “Angels” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, David M. Scholer, E. F. Ferguson, M. P. McHugh, eds. (New York: Garland Publishers, 1990), 38-42.

<sup>12</sup>Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1878, 1972), 264.

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them believed angels existed. Ignatius of Antioch, an early church father, believed angels’ salvation depended on the blood of Christ. Origen (182-251) declared their sinlessness, saying that if it were possible for an angel to fall, then it might be possible for a demon to be saved. The latter was ultimately rejected by church councils.<sup>13</sup>

By A.D. 400 Jerome (347–420) believed guardian angels were awarded to humans at birth. Later, Peter Lombard (ca. A.D. 1100-1160) added that a solitary angel could guard many people at one time.\*

Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. A.D. 500) contributed this period’s most notable discussion. He pictured an angel as “an image of God, a manifestation of the unmanifested light, a pure mirror, what is most clear, without flaw, undefiled, and unstained.”<sup>14</sup> Like Irenaeus four hundred years previous (ca. 130–95), he also constructed hypotheses concerning an angelic hierarchy.<sup>15</sup> Then Gregory the Great (A.D. 540–604) awarded angels celestial bodies.

As the thirteenth century dawned, angels became the subject of much speculation. Most significant were questions asked by the Italian theologian Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225–74). Seven of his 118 conjectures probed such areas as the following: Of what is an angel’s body composed? Is there more than one species of angels? When angels assume human form do they exercise vital body functions? Do angels know if it is morning or evening? Can they understand many thoughts at one time? Do they know our secret thoughts? Can they talk one to the **other**?<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup>F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingston, “Angels” in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 52-53.

<sup>14</sup>Unsworth, “Angels,” 31. Scripture does not expressly endorse guardian angels as a special class. It speaks, rather, of angels who guard.

<sup>15</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, trans. John D. Jones (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 153.

<sup>16</sup>Unsworth, “Angels,” 31.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Great Books of the World The Summa Theologica*, Aquinas, Robert Hutchinson, ed., vol. 19 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica), 269–585. Aquinas finally loathed his theological method. After a “wonderful spiritual experience,” Aquinas stopped writing forever, saying, “All I have written and taught seems but of small account to me.” Alexander Whyte, *The Nature of Angels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 7. Johannes Duns Scotus (1265-1308), Albert the Great (1193–1280) and Francisco de Suarez (1548-1617) used an approach similar to that of Aquinas.

Most descriptive, perhaps, were portrayals by Renaissance artists who painted angels as less than “manly figures .... childlike harpists and horn tooters [who were] a far cry from Michael the Archangel.” Daubed as “chubby, high-cholesterol cherubs, dressed in a few wisps of strategically placed **cloth**”<sup>18</sup> these creatures were often used as decorative borders for many paintings.

Medieval Christianity assimilated the mass of speculations and consequently began including angel worship in its liturgies. This aberration continued to grow and Pope Clement X (who was pope in the years A.D. **1670-1676**) declared a feast to honor **angels**.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of Roman Catholic excesses, Reformed Christianity continued to insist that angels help God’s people. John Calvin (1509–64) believed that “angels are dispensers and administrators of God’s **beneficence** towards us. ...[T]hey keep vigil for our safety, take upon themselves our defense, direct our ways, and take care that some harm may not befall us.”<sup>20</sup>

Martin Luther (1483–1546) in *Tabletalk* spoke in similar terms. He remarked how these spiritual beings created by God served the Church and the **kingdom**, being very close to God and to the Christian. “They stand before the face of the Father, next to the sun, but without effort they [are able to] swiftly come to our **aid**.”<sup>21</sup>

As the Age of Rationalism dawned (ca. 1800), the possibility of the supernatural was seriously doubted, and historically accepted teachings of the Church began to be questioned. Consequently, some skeptics began to label angels “impersonations of divine energies, or of good and bad principles, or of diseases and natural **influences**.”<sup>22</sup>

By 1918 some Jewish scholars began echoing this liberal voice, saying angels were not valid because they are not **nec-**

“Unsworth, “Angels,” 31. Muschamp, “Angels,” 279, calls angels a “casualty of the Renaissance.” For the historical presentation of angels in art and literature see Gustav Davidson, *The Dictionary of Angels, Including the Fallen* (New York: Free Press, 1971) and Theodora Ward, *Men and Angels* (New York: Viking Press, 1969).

<sup>19</sup>Unsworth, “Angels,” 32.

<sup>20</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed., vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 166.

<sup>21</sup>Martin Luther, “Protective Angels and Destructive Demons, Between November 24 and December 8, 1532, no. 2829.” Luther’s Works: *Tabletalk*, Helmut T. Lehman, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 54: 172.

<sup>22</sup>Dabney, *Lectures*, 264.

essary. “A world of law and process does not need a living ladder to lead from the earth beyond to God on **high**.”<sup>23</sup>

This did not shake the faith of conservative **Evangelicals**. They have continued to endorse the validity of angels.\*\*

#### THE CONSENSUS OF THE MODERN SCENE

Perhaps the liberal theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) posed the modern periods most radical view. He considered angels Platonic essences: emanations from God who desired to do more than reveal himself to humanity. He believed angels actually wanted to return to the divine essence from which they came and to again be equal with Him. Tillich’s advice, then, was this: “To interpret the concept of angels in a meaningful way today, interpret them as the Platonic essences, as the powers of being, not as special beings. If you interpret them in the latter way, it all becomes crude **mythology**.”<sup>25</sup>

Karl Barth (1886–1968) and Millard Erickson (1932–), however, encouraged an opposite approach of healthful caution. Barth, father of neoorthodoxy, tagged this subject “the most remarkable and **difficult** of all.” He recognized the interpreter’s conundrum: How was one to “advance without becoming rash”; to be “both open and cautious, critical and naive, perspicuous and **modest**?”<sup>26</sup>

Erickson, a conservative theologian, amended Barth’s sentiment, adding how one might be tempted to omit or neglect the topic of angels, yet “if we are to be faithful students of the Bible, we have no choice but to speak of these **beings**.”<sup>27</sup>

In popular writings about angels, however, there has been some extremism. Interest in angels has revived, but often with dubious or unscriptural ideas. One person, for example, claims to derive immense comfort from angels, saying, “I talk to my

<sup>23</sup>Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1968), 180.

<sup>24</sup>Augustus H. Strong, Alexander Whyte, and Robert L. Dabney were some conservative scholars of this period.

<sup>25</sup>Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 94. See also James M. Wall, “Unlearning Skepticism: An Angelic Meditation,” *The Christian Century*, 28 September 1988, 827.

<sup>26</sup>Karl Barth, “The Kingdom of Heaven, The Ambassadors of God and Their Opponents,” *Church Dogmatics: Doctrines of Creation*, T. F. Torrance, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds., vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 369.

<sup>27</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology* 434.

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guardian angel often. It helps me to sort things out.” Others report personal visitations and protection by angels, or describe them in a way that seems to make them butlers from heaven who serve the Christian’s **whims**.<sup>28</sup> Some say angels “minister in accordance [with] the Word of God .... [and their only] limitation seems to be the deficiency of the Word in the mouth of the believers to whom they are **ministering**.”<sup>29</sup>

## BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

“There [is] only one way to demythologize popular fantasies about angels—get back to the biblical **reality**.”<sup>30</sup>

Angels enjoy a reason for being that all volitional beings can experience. They worship God and render Him service. Their general purpose, reflected in the Hebrew and Greek words translated “angel” (*mal’akh* and *angelos*, “messenger”), is to carry the message of divine words and works.

Angels, then, primarily serve God. They also serve people as a direct result of serving God. While Scripture recognizes them as “ministering spirits sent to serve those who will

<sup>28</sup>Unsworth, “Angels,” 32. Roland Buck, *Angels on Assignment* (Kingwood, Tex.: Hunter Books, 1979). Malcolm Godwin, *Angels: An Engendered Species* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), describes how some believe angels disguise themselves as flying saucers. For conservative testimonies about angelic visits see W. Norman Day, “Guardian Angels,” *The Pentecostal Testimony*, October 1986, 34-35; Carolyn Hittenberger, “Angel on the Fender,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, 5 July 1987, 10; Melvin E. Jorgenson, “Angelic Escort,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, 21 December 1980, 7-8; and Ann Wedgeworth, *Magnificent Strangers* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1979). For evaluations of angelic visitations see B. Zerebesky, “What About All Those Angel Stories?” *Charisma* (December 1983), 76-78; J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 195; and id., “Comprehensive Critique of *Angels on Assignment* Including a List of Five Tests for Angelic Visitations” (published by the author). Charles and Annette Capps, *Angels!* (Tulsa: Harrison House, 1984), encourage believers to command angels to assist them. Scripture, however, portrays angels commanding people (Matt. 1:24; 2: 19-21; Acts 8:26; 10:3-5, 22; 11:13; 12:7-8; Rev. 11:1).

<sup>29</sup>Marilyn Hickey, *Treading with Angels* (Denver: Layman’s Library, 1980), 8. However, all benefits of salvation, including the protection of angels, are based on God’s effort, not ours. Cf. Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983), 478, who add, “Nowhere are we instructed to pray to angels and request their help.” See also Kenneth D. Barney, “Supernatural Bodyguards,” *Pentecostal Evangel* (22 February 1981): 8-9.

<sup>30</sup>William Baker, “Angels: Our Chariots of Fire,” *Moody Monthly*, 6 January 1986, 85.

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inherit salvation” (Heb. 1: 14), they are, nevertheless, “spirits sent” by God (Rev. 22: 16).

That they are servants of God is implied also by the language of Scripture. They are designated “the angel of the **LORD**” (forty-nine times), “the angel of God” (eighteen times), and the angels of the Son of Man (seven times). God specifically calls them “my angels” (three times), and people referred to them as “His angels” (twelve **times**).<sup>31</sup> Finally, when the term “angels” occurs by itself the context normally indicates whose they are. They belong to God!

All angels were created at one time; that is, the Bible gives no indication of a schedule of incremental creation of angels (or anything else). They were formed by and for Christ when “He commanded and they were created” (Ps. 148:5; *see also* Col. 1:16-17; 1 Pet. 3:22). And since angels “neither marry nor [are] given in marriage” (Matt. 22:30), they are a complete company having no need for reproduction.

As created beings they are everlasting but not eternal. God alone has no beginning and no end (1 Tim. 6:16). Angels had a beginning but will know no end, for they are present in the eternal age and in the New Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:9, 12).

Angels have unique natures; they are superior to humans (Ps. 8:5), but inferior to the incarnate Jesus (Heb. 1:6). *The Bible* brings out the following seven facts concerning them:

1. Angels are real but not always visible (Heb. 12:22). Although God occasionally gives them visible human form (Gen. 19:1-22), they are spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7, 14). In Bible times people sometimes experienced the effects of an angel’s presence but saw no one (Num. 22:21-35). Sometimes they did see the angel (Gen. 19:1-22; Judg. 2:1-4; 6:11-22; 13:3-21; Matt. 1:20-25; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4-6; Acts 5:19-20).<sup>32</sup> In addition, angels might be seen but not recognized as angels (Heb. 13:2).

2. Angels worship but are not to be worshiped. “[T]hey are unique among the creatures, but they are nonetheless **crea-**

<sup>31</sup>“My angels” occurs in Exod. 23:23; 32:34; Rev. 22:16. “His angels” in Gen. 24:40; Job 4:18; Pss. 91:11; 103:20; 148:2; Dan. 6:22; Luke 4:10; Acts 12:11; Rev. 3:5; 12:7; 22:6. The “Son of Man’s” angels in Matt. 13:41; 16:27; 24:30-31; Mark 13:26-27).

<sup>32</sup>Allan K. Jenkins, “Young Man or Angel?” *The Expository Times* 94 (May 1983): 237-40. He doubts that the “young man” of Mark 16:5 was an angel. He connects the white robe with martyrdom.

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tures.”<sup>33</sup> They respond with worship and praise to God (Ps. 148:2; Isa. 6:1–3; Luke 2:13–15; Rev. 4:6–11; 5:1–14) and to Christ (Heb. 1:6). Consequently, Christians are not to exalt angels (Rev. 22:8–9); unwise Christians who do so forfeit their reward (Col. 2:18).

3. Angels serve but are not to be served. God sends them as agents to help people, especially His own (Exod. 14:19; 23:23; 32:34; 33:2–3; Num. 20:16; 22:22–35; Judg. 6:11–22; 1 Kings 19:5–8; Pss. 34:7; 91:11; Isa. 63:9; Dan. 3:28; Acts 12:7–12; 27:23–25; Heb. 13:2). Angels also mediate God’s judgment (Gen. 19:22; see also 19:24; Ps. 35:6; Acts 12:23) or messages (Judg. 2:1–5; Matt. 1:20–24; Luke 1:11–38).<sup>34</sup> But angels are never to be served, for angels are like Christians in one very important way: They too are “fellow servants” (Rev. 22:9).

4. Angels accompany revelation but do not replace it in whole or in part. God uses them, but they are not the goal of God’s revelation (Heb. 2:2ff.). In the first century, a heresy arose that required “false humility and the worship of angels” (Col. 2:18). It involved, “harsh treatment of the body” but did nothing to restrain “sensual indulgence” (Col. 2:23). Its philosophy emphasized the false ideas that (a) Christians are inferior in their ability to personally approach God; (b) angels have a superior ability to do so; and (c) worship is due them because of their intervention in our behalf.<sup>35</sup> Paul responded with a hymn glorifying Christ who is the source of our future glory (Col. 3:1–4).

5. Angels know much but not everything. Their insight is imparted by God; it is not innate or infinite. Their wisdom may be vast (2 Sam. 14:20), but their knowledge is limited:

<sup>33</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 439.

<sup>34</sup>Angels often mediate God’s judgment (2 Sam. 24:16; 2 Kings 19:35; 1 Chron. 21:14–15; Ps. 78:49; Rev. 1:1–15; 5:2–11; 6:7–8; 8:2–13; 9:1–15; 10:1–10; 14:18–20; 15:1–8; 16:1–5, 17; 17:1–17; 18:1, 21; 19:17–18). They also declare God’s message (Judg. 2:1–5; 3:3–22; 5:23; 2 Kings 1:3–15; Isa. 37:6; Zech. 1:9–14, 19; 2:3–13; 3:1–10; 4:1–14; 5:5–11; 6:4–8; Matt. 28:5; Luke 2:9–21; John 20:12; Acts 7:53; 8:26; 10:3, 7, 22; 11:13; Heb. 2:2; Rev. 1:1).

<sup>35</sup>Most commentators believe very little evidence supports a universal cult of angel worship by the Jews. The heresy was merely a local Colossian problem. See E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), 247–48. See also Peter ‘C. O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians, Philemon*, David Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, eds., vol. 44 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 142–43.

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They do not know the day of our Lord’s second coming (Matt. 24:36) or the full magnitude of human salvation (1 Pet. 1:12).

6. Angelic power is superior but not supreme. God simply lends His power to angels as His agents. Angels are, therefore, “stronger and more powerful” than people (2 Pet. 2:11). As “mighty ones who do his bidding,” (Ps. 103:20) “powerful angels” mediate God’s final judgments on sin (2 Thess. 1:7; Rev. 5:2, 11; 7:1–3; 8:2–13; 9:1–15; 10:1–11; 14:6–12, 15–20; 15:1–8; 16:1–12; 17:1–3, 7; 18:1–2, 21; 19:17–18). Angels are often used in mighty deliverance (Dan. 3:28; 6:22; Acts 12:7–11) and healings (John 5:4).<sup>36</sup> And an angel will single-handedly throw the Christian’s chief and most powerful foe into the abyss and lock him in for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–3).

7. Angels make decisions. The disobedience of one group implies an ability to choose and influence others with wickedness (1 Tim. 4:1). On the other hand, the good angel’s refusal of John’s worship (Rev. 22:8–9) implies an ability to choose and influence others with good.<sup>37</sup> Although good angels respond obediently to God’s command, they are not automata. Rather, they choose devoted obedience with intense ardor.

The number of angels is immense, “thousands upon thousands” (Heb. 12:22), “and ten thousand times ten thousand” (Rev. 5:11).<sup>38</sup> Jesus expressed the same idea when he said, “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions<sup>39</sup> of angels?” (Matt. 26:53).

Some interpreters see a five-stage hierarchy of angels with lower-ranking angels subject to those in higher positions: “thrones,” “powers,” “rulers,” “authorities,” and “dominion”

<sup>36</sup>Zane C. Hodges, “Problem Passages in the Gospel of John, Part 5: The Angel at Bethesda—John 5:4,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January to March, 1979): 25–39. He cites strong manuscript evidence supporting the authenticity of John 5:4, thus allowing for the existence of the angel at Bethesda.

<sup>37</sup>Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 445.

<sup>38</sup>Duffield and Van Cleave, *Foundations*, 467, interpret Rev. 5:11 literally. Medieval scholars attempted to calculate what might be the minimum number of angels using biblical numerology, i.e., “calculating words into numbers and numbers into words.” Based on this system fourteenth-century Cabalists posited the existence of 30 1,655,722 angels. See Gustav Davidson, *The Dictionary of Angels*, xxi.

<sup>39</sup>During the Republican conquest a Roman legion consisted of 4,200 foot soldiers and 300 cavalry. *The Complete Biblical Library*, vol. 14 (Springfield, Mo.: 1986), 38.

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(Rom. 8:38; Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16; 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:22). Contextually, however, this is dubious. The plain emphasis of these passages is not the subjection of angels to one another, but the subjection of both angels and demons to Christ, the Lord of all (cf. Rom. 8:39; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:16–18; 1 Pet. 3:22).<sup>40</sup>

Angels work for God in obedience to His dictates, never apart from them. “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Heb. 1:14). They are “sent.” God commands their specific activities (Pss. 91:11; 103:20–21),<sup>41</sup> for they are His servants (Heb. 1:7).

Although angels are sent to serve us, that service (Gk. *diakonian*) is primarily spiritual help, relief, and support; however, it may include tangible acts of love as well. The corresponding verb (*diëkonoun*) is used of angels’ supernaturally caring for Jesus after Satan tempted Him (Matt. 4:11). Other examples of God’s sending angels for the help or relief of believers include the angels at the tomb (Matt. 28:2–7; Mark 16:5–7; Luke 24:4–7; John 20:11–13) and the angelic deliverances of apostles (Acts 5:18–20; 12:7–10; 27:23–26). An angel also gave **directions** to Philip because God saw the faith and desire of an Ethiopian eunuch and wanted him to become an heir of salvation (Acts 8:26). An angel brought God’s message to Cornelius, too, that he might be saved (Acts 10:3–6). These were ministries sent in the providence of **God**.<sup>42</sup> In no case, however, is there any evidence that believers can demand angelic help or command angels. God alone can and does command them.

In addition to beings specifically designated as angels, the Old Testament speaks of similar beings often classed with angels: cherubs, seraphs, and messengers (“watchers,” KJV).

Cherubs and seraphs respond to God’s immediate presence. Cherubs (Heb. *k’ruvim*, related to an Akkadian verb meaning “to bless, praise, adore”) are always **affiliated** with God’s holiness and the adoration His immediate presence

<sup>40</sup>Irenaeus (AD. 130–200) and Dionysius (AD. 500) speculated regarding angelic hierarchy. Scripture expresses a simple hierarchy—angels and a chief angel (the archangel Michael; 1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 9). Meyer reminds us that any attempt to precisely establish any order “belongs to the fanciful domain of theosophy.” See Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, vol. 3 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1856), 205.

<sup>41</sup>Angels are sent by God’s command (Gen. 24:7; 24:40; Exod. 23:20; 23:23; 32:34; 33:2; 2 Chron. 32:21; Dan. 6:22; Matt. 13:41; 24:31; Luke 1:26; 4:10; Acts 12:11; Rev. 22:6; 22:16).

<sup>42</sup>See Everitt M. Fjordbak, *An Exposition and Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Dallas: Wisdom House Publishers, 1983), 39–42.

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inspires (Exod. 25:20,22; 26:31; Num. 7:89; 2 Sam. 6:2; 1 Kings 6:29,32; 7:29; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chron. 13:6; Pss. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16; Ezek. 1:5–26; 9:3; 10:1–22; 11:22). Protecting God’s holiness is their great concern; they prevented Adam and Eve’s reentry into the Garden (Gen. 3:24).<sup>43</sup> Carved figures of gold cherubs were **fastened** to the atonement cover (“mercy seat,” KJV) of the ark of the covenant, where their wings were a “shelter” for the ark of the covenant and a support (“chariot”) for God’s invisible throne (1 Chron. 28:18).

In Ezekiel cherubs are highly symbolic creatures having human and animal characteristics, with two faces (Ezek. 41:18–20) or four (Ezek. 1:6; 10:1–4).<sup>44</sup> In Ezekiel’s inaugural vision, God’s throne is above the cherubs with their four faces. The face of the man is mentioned **first** as the highest of God’s creation, with the face of the lion representing wild animals, that of the ox representing domestic animals, and that of the eagle representing birds; thus picturing the fact that God is over all His creation. The cherubs also have hooves (Ezek. 1:7), and the ox face is the actual face of the cherub (Ezek. 10:14). God is sometimes pictured as riding on them as “on the wings of the wind” (2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10).

The seraphs (from the Hebrew *saraph*, “to burn”) are pictured in Isaiah’s inaugural vision (Isa. 6:1–3) as so radiating the glory and brilliant purity of God that they seem to be on fire. They declare God’s unique glory and supreme **holiness**.<sup>45</sup> Like cherubs, seraphs guard God’s throne (Isa. 6:6–7).<sup>46</sup> Some scholars believe the “living creatures” (Rev. 4:6–9) to be

<sup>43</sup>The presence of cherubs before the death of any human being seems to be further evidence that human beings do not become angels after death.

Middle East excavations have revealed cherublike images possessing a human face and an animal body with four legs and two wings. Such figures appear repeatedly in Near Eastern mythology and architecture. See R. K. Harrison, “Cherubim,” *The New Bible Dictionary*, 2d ed., J. D. Douglas, et al., eds. (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1982), 185–86; “Cherub,” *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 454–55.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid. Harris states these four faces represent “birds, tame animals, wild animals and men in attendance before God.”

<sup>45</sup>The threefold repetition, “Holy, holy, holy,” means God is “different,” “unique,” “set apart,” and gives emphasis to God’s holiness. Some see also an implication of the Trinity.

<sup>46</sup>The seraphs’ covered faces depict an “awe that dared not gaze at the glory.” Their covered feet illustrates “the lowliness of their glorious service.” Their hovering posture portrays a readiness to do God’s errands. See W. E. Vine, *Isaiah: prophecies, Promises, Warnings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 29. See also Harris, “Cherub,” 454–55.



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synonymous with seraphs and cherubs; however, the cherubs in Ezekiel look alike and the “living creatures” in Revelation are different from each other.<sup>47</sup>

“Messengers” or “watchers” (Aram. *‘irin*, related to the Heb. *‘ur*, “be awake”)<sup>48</sup> are mentioned only in Daniel 4:13, 17, 23. They are “holy ones” who are eager promoters of God’s sovereign decrees and demonstrated God’s sovereign lordship over Nebuchadnezzar.

Another special designation in the Old Testament is “the angel of the LORD” (*mal’akh YHWH*). In many of the sixty Old Testament occurrences of “the” angel of the LORD, he is identified with God himself (Gen. 16:11; cf. 16:13; 18:2; cf. 18:13–33; 22:11–18; 24:7; 31:11–13; 32:24–30; Exod. 3:2–6; Judg. 2:1; 6:11, 14; 13:21–22). Yet this “angel of the LORD” is also distinguishable from God, for God speaks to this angel (2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chron. 21:15), and this angel speaks to God (Zech. 1:12).<sup>49</sup> Thus, in the opinion of many, “the” angel of the Lord occupies a unique category. “He is not just a higher angel, or even the highest: He is the Lord appearing in angelic form.” Since this angel is not mentioned in the New Testament, he probably was a manifestation of the Second Person of the Trinity.<sup>50</sup> Some object, saying that any preincarnate manifestation of Jesus would take away from the uniqueness of the Incarnation. However, in His incarnation, Jesus identified himself fully with humankind from birth to death and made possible our identification with Him in His death and resurrection. No temporary preincarnate manifestation could possibly detract from the uniqueness of that.

<sup>47</sup>Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament vol. 4* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell and Co., 1866), 599, suggests that the living creatures are “forms compounded out of the most significant particulars of more than one Old Testament vision.”

<sup>48</sup>A. D. “Watchers,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 1023. Some believe “watchers” are a special class of angels affecting human history. See C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 59. Others believe “watchers” was simply a descriptive phrase denoting the vigilance of angels. See John F. Walvoord, Daniel: *Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 102.

<sup>49</sup>T. E. McComiskey, “Angel of the Lord,” in *Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Ellwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 55.

<sup>50</sup>“Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, 181. Williams labels these theophanies “temporary visits by the Second Person of the Trinity prior to His coming in human flesh.”

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## THE ROLE OF ANGELS

Angels work in Christ’s life. In past eternity angels **worshipped** Christ (Heb. 1:6). **They** prophesied and announced His birth (Matt. 1:20–24; Luke 1:26–28; 2:8–20), protected Him in His infancy (Matt. 2:13–23), and witnessed His **incarnate** life (1 Tim. 3:16). They will also accompany Him in His visible return (Matt. 24:31; 25:31; Mark 8:38; 13:27; Luke 9:26; 2 *Thess.* 1:7).

During His life on earth Jesus sometimes desired angelic assistance. He welcomed the aid of angels after the wilderness temptation (Matt. 4:11) and during His struggle in **Gethsemane** (Luke 22:43). Both His resurrection (Matt. 28:2, 5; Luke 24:23; John 20:12) and ascension (Acts 1:11) were accompanied by them. Yet sometimes He declined their help. During His wilderness temptation He said no to a potential misappropriation of their protective power (Matt. 4:6) and later refused their rescue from His impending trial and crucifixion (Matt. 26:53).<sup>51</sup>

Angels work in people’s lives. Angels protect believers from harm, especially when such aid is necessary for the continued proclamation of the gospel (Acts 5:19–20; 12:7–17; 27:23–24; cf. 28:30–31). They assist but never replace the Holy Spirit’s role in salvation and in the believer’s proclamation of **Christ** (Acts 8:26; 10:1–8; cf. 10:44–48). Angels can help the believer’s outward, physical necessities, while the Holy Spirit aids inward spiritual illumination.

Although angels escort the righteous to a place of reward (Luke 16:22), Christians, not angels, will share Christ’s rule in the world to come (Heb. 2:5). Believers will also evaluate the performance of angels (1 Cor. 6:3). Until then, Christ’s disciples must live and worship carefully so as not to offend these heavenly onlookers (1 Cor. 4:9; 11:10; 1 Tim. 5:21).

Angels work in the unbeliever’s life. There is joy in the angels’ presence when sinners repent (Luke 15:10); but the **angels** will soberly mediate God’s **final** judgments upon humans refusing Christ (Matt. 13:39–43; Rev. 8:6–13; 9:1–21;

<sup>51</sup>Angels in the Gospels function like those in the Old Testament. However, “unlike the OT and other Jewish writings, the angelology of the Gospels is, like the Gospels as a whole, Christocentric.” They bring direct revelation **from** God on two occasions only: Jesus’ birth and resurrection. “In the interim he himself is the preeminent disclosure of God.” M. J. Davidson “Angels,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, eds. (Downers Grove, 111.: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 11.

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14:6–20; 15:1,6–8; 16:1–21; 18:1–24; 19:1–21; cf. 20:2,10,14–15).

In times past, angels announced Christ's birth, altering human history forever. In the present, their protection gives us confidence. Their final exile of evil is part of our future victory. With the Father for us, Christ above us, the Spirit inside us, and angels beside us, we are encouraged to press on to the prize before us.

## SATAN AND DEMONS

At sunrise on December 28, 1843, Pastor Johann Blumhardt found himself exhausted at the end of an all-night vigil of praying fervently for the healing and deliverance of **Gottlieben** Dittus, a young woman severely tormented by evil spirits. Gottlieben had come to Pastor Blumhardt months earlier complaining of fainting spells and of hearing strange voices and noises in the night. He had attempted at **first** to help her through pastoral counseling. However, the more time he had spent with her the more violent her symptoms and torment had become. Investigation into Gottlieben's life revealed that at an early age she had been abused and dedicated to Satan by a wicked aunt, who also had involved her in occult worship.

In one of Pastor Blumhardt's sessions with Gottlieben, she had begun to convulse, writhing and foaming at the mouth. At that point, Pastor Blumhardt had become convinced that something demonic was at work. He jumped up and trumpeted forth, "We have seen what Satan can do, now we want to see what Jesus can do!" He forced Gottlieben's hands together and had her pray after him, "Jesus, help me." The symptoms subsided, but the battle for Gottlieben's deliverance was not yet over.

Blumhardt could not tolerate watching the woman be tormented by dark forces. The burning question came to him, "Who is the Lord?" Prior to this, Pastor Blumhardt had always gone to Gottlieben to pray for her deliverance. After numerous prayer sessions, however, Gottlieben had decided for the first time to come to Pastor Blumhardt's home for prayer, an obvious sign that she wanted deliverance for herself. Soon afterward Pastor Blumhardt found himself at the close of the all-night prayer vigil mentioned above. Suddenly, as the sun began to rise on that December morning in 1843, a demon cried out, "Jesus is Victor!" Gottlieben was completely set free.

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From that moment on, Gottlieben was able to lead a normal life. She married, had children, and became an active member of the retreat center established by the Blumhardts at Bad Boll, near Stuttgart, in southern **Germany**.<sup>52</sup> From this **exorcism** experience, Blumhardt learned something new about the power of God's kingdom to set people free, not just from inner rebellion against God, but from external forces of darkness in the world, including society and the entire **cosmos**.<sup>53</sup> Because of Blumhardt, modern theologians as diverse as Karl Barth, Jurgen Moltmann, and various European Pentecostal leaders have found a renewal of the biblical emphasis on the breaking in of God's kingdom to make all things new. Blumhardt's discovery of the gospel's power to transform all of reality was a refreshing alternative to the liberal view of evil as a mere lack of "God consciousness," or to a simplistic, pietistic limitation of evil to the inner regions of the human soul. The cry "**Jesus is Victor!**" that came at the end of the exorcism became a major impulse behind a significant development in modern **theology**.<sup>54</sup>

The story of Blumhardt's battle in prayer for Gottlieben's deliverance raises a number of questions about the realm of the demonic in the light of the Scriptures. For example, if God is sovereign and Jesus is Victor, why did Blumhardt have to fight so vigorously for Gottlieben's freedom? To answer such questions, one must turn to the Word of God. Although experience plays a role in one's understanding of the Bible, the Scriptures represent the final court of appeal in the search for answers concerning Satan and demons.

## SATAN AND DEMONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The people of ancient societies and cultures during the development of the Old Testament Scriptures tended to advocate a rather frightening view of the world. They believed that spirits and demigods, some more evil than others, were

<sup>52</sup>*Blumhardt's Battle: A Conflict with Satan*, translated by F. S. Boshold (New York: Thomas E. Lowe, 1970), 18, 21–22, 54–55.

<sup>53</sup>F. D. Macchia, "Spirituality and Social Liberation: The Message of the Blumhardts in the Light of Wuertemberg Pietism," in *Experiences of the Spirit*, ed. A. B. Jongeneel (Bern: Peter Lang Verlag, 199 1).

<sup>54</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatic* 4:3: 168–71; J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 282; W. Hollenweger, "Pentecostalism and the Third World," *Dialog* (Spring 1970); Eugen Edel, *Aus Pfarrer Blumhardt's Leben und Wirken, Die Pfingstbewegung im Lichte der Kirchengeschichte* (Verlag Emil Hamburg).

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able to intrude at will into a person's everyday life. Elaborate incantations, spiritistic forms of communication, and magical rituals developed in various **cultic** settings to grant the common person an element of control in this threatening world of spirit activity. In a more philosophical vein, many of the ancient Greeks advocated a string of spirit beings, of various degrees of goodness, that function as intermediaries between humanity and **God**.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast to such religious orientations is the unique Old Testament witness to Jehovah (i.e., Yahweh), the Lord: This God and Creator of all is not only Lord of Israel, but also the Lord of hosts, who reigns supreme over the entire universe. In life, one must contend with the Lord and the Lord alone. He alone is to be loved, feared, and worshiped (Ps. 139; Isa. 43). Because the Lord is sovereign, no spiritistic communications or magical incantations or rituals were to have any place in the faith of Israel (Isa. 8: 19–22). The Lord cannot be manipulated. The spirit beings that loomed so large in the lives and religions of other ancient peoples receded into near oblivion in the light of the sovereign Lord and the divine Word to Israel. The evil spirits were not the lords of the universe, neither could they mediate between God and humanity. Demonology plays no significant role in the Old Testament.

This is not to say, however, that there is no satanic adversary in the Old Testament.<sup>56</sup> One does indeed find the presence of such an adversary in the Old Testament as early as the temptation of humanity's first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1 through 3). Here the adversary, in the form of a reptile, begins with a question and follows it with a denial, tempting Eve to sin. God's command to Adam and Eve not to eat of the forbidden tree lest they die (Gen. 2:17) was transformed by the serpent into the promise that they would not die, but would instead become like God (Gen. 3:4–5). Notice that the tempter is described as one creature among others, not as a god who can in any way compete with the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth. Adam and Eve are **not** faced at the beginning with a struggle between two gods, one good and one evil. To the contrary, they are made to

<sup>55</sup>W. Foerster, "DAIMON, DAIMONION," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964), 1-10.

The term *Satan* is the Hebrew for "adversary," "accuser," derived from the verb *satan*, "keep a grudge against, or animosity toward."

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choose between the command of the one true God and the word of a lowly creature-tempter who can thwart **God's will only** through the disobedience of God's servants. In fact, the tempter actually seems to be allowed by God to test Adam and Eve's faithfulness.

This adversary appears again at the beginning of the Book of Job. There the reader is made privy to a conversation between the Lord and the adversary about the faithfulness of Job. The adversary questions Job's motives and at the same time implies that God is deceiving himself and has obtained Job's love only by bribing him with blessings. Thus the adversary is God's enemy as well as Job's. Yet the Lord grants him permission to inflict tragedy and illness on Job to test Job's faithfulness. Job, however, knows nothing about the adversary's challenge. The Book of Job centers on Job's search for God in the midst of his trials, and ends with a dramatic appearance of the Lord to answer Job (Job 38). Through a series of questions, the Lord leads Job to accept the mystery of divine sovereignty over the world and over all the affairs of life, no matter how perplexing they may seem. The adversary does not appear with the Lord. In fact, the adversary has no part in the Book of Job once the initial destruction depicted in the opening chapters has taken place. If Job wrestles, it is not with the adversary, but with God.

The Old Testament contains no absolute dualism of God versus Satan whereby the religious person is manipulated by one side or the other in a grand cosmic battle between two ultimate forces. Satan moves only by the permission of, and within the boundaries established by, the Lord and Creator of all things. However, Satan and his dark forces do not function as tame pets in the heavenly court of the Lord or merely **as** tools of the Lord in the testing of humanity. One does not have monism, in which only the Lord exists behind all of the affairs of life, with no opposing forces that seek to thwart His redemptive will. As in the temptation of Adam and Eve, the adversary seeks to distort the will of the Lord by a lie. But after Adam and Eve's fall into sin, the promise was given that the seed of the woman would "crush" the reptile's head (Gen. 3:15).<sup>57</sup>

In addition, sinister forces are behind certain pagan governments in the Book of Daniel (e.g., "prince of the Persian kingdom"), for they sought to hinder the arrival of God's

<sup>57</sup>This promise is often referred to as the *protevangelium*, a foreshadower of the gospel of Christ and His victory over Satan.

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angelic messenger to Daniel (Dan. 10: 13). A battle was fought between these dark forces and God's archangel Michael, in which Michael won the victory, so that Daniel might receive the word of the Lord. Although Daniel was unaware of the battle and had no part in it, the Book of Daniel does imply that even though God's purposes are redemptive and loving, demonic forces seek to oppose God and the divine will for creation.

## GOD'S VICTORY OVER SATAN AND DEMONS

One **finds** an increased awareness of the opposition of Satan and demons to God and humanity in intertestamental Jewish literature, leading to speculation about the influence of Persian **dualism**.<sup>58</sup> Actually, however, there was already an increased Jewish awareness of a spiritual conflict between demons and God's redemptive purposes.

## SATAN AND DEMONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

With the appearance of Jesus Christ as "God with us" to bring salvation to the world (Matt. 1:21–23) came an unprecedented emergence of the conflict with, and the defeat of, the forces of darkness. Jesus confronted His audiences with the astounding assertion that the kingdom of God had already broken in to clarify this conflict and to bring it to a decisive turn. He stated: " 'If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' " (Matt. 12:28). The numerous references to and accounts of Jesus' casting out demons (Mark 1:23–28; 5:1–20; 7:24–30; 9:14–29), as well as the charge from Jesus' opposition that He was casting out demons by the power of Satan (Matt. 12:27–28), make it clear that Jesus publicly defeated demonic spirits as an aspect of His ministry. Because Jesus defeated demons by the Spirit of God, the charge that He did this under the power of Satan was in direct opposition to God's redemptive act in Christ.<sup>59</sup>

The longest account given of an exorcism, that of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1–20), shows Jesus responding to the weak cries of a demonic "legion" for mercy by casting

<sup>58</sup>Foerster, "DAIMON," 10–16.

<sup>59</sup>J. Ramsey Michaels, "Jesus and the Unclean Spirits," in *Demon Possession, a Medical, Historical, Anthropological, and Theological Symposium*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), 41–57.

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*the* demons into a herd of pigs. The herd then runs madly into the nearby lake to their own death. The emphasis here is obviously on the vast number of demons being defeated at once by the same power of command by which Jesus calmed the stormy seas (Mark 4:35–41, a passage directly preceding the account of the Gerasene demoniac). The sovereignty of God is implied, but it is not a sovereignty devoid of genuine conflict and victory.

Jesus' act of casting out demons **finds** its focus in His defeat of the prince of darkness, Satan. In fact, Jesus' public ministry did not begin until after He defeated the adversary in an initial and decisive conflict in the wilderness temptation (Matt. 4: 1–11). At every point of this temptation, Satan attempted to make Jesus prove His messianic identity in a way that would be disobedient to the will of the Father and would break His identification with humankind, which had been declared at His baptism. Turning the stones into bread, throwing himself from the highest point of the temple, and grasping the power of worldly governments were major temptations by Satan to seduce Jesus from His true messianic mission. But unlike the first Adam, Jesus the Second Adam was faithful to God in the **face** of Satan's seduction and lies (Rom. 5:12–19). The Gospels imply that Satan's defeat devastates the entire kingdom of darkness, for binding "the strong man" (Satan) allowed Jesus to "rob his house" (Matt. 12:29). This victory over Satan was to be decisively **fulfilled** in Jesus' death and resurrection.

The coming of Jesus Christ as God's divine Son to bring salvation and deliverance clarifies the Old Testament critique of the pagan views of evil spirits mentioned earlier. The pagan notion of a world invaded chaotically by multiple spirits, some worse than others, is clearly set aside by the revelation of evil spirits as all diametrically opposed to God and under one head, Satan the adversary. The spiritistic notion that many or all of these spirits could be departed souls of human beings is also discounted. The evil forces behind Satan in the Gospels have no roots in the human **race**.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup>The Bible says little about the origin of demons. Most evangelicals identify them with angels who sinned (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Their fall probably took place between the time God pronounced everything in creation exceedingly good (Gen. 1:3 1) and the temptation by Satan (Gen. 3: 1–5). Although they are said to be "bound," this does not seem to be the kind of complete binding of Rev. 20:1–3. Rather, they are bound under a sentence of doom which will be finally fulfilled in the future. In the meantime, demons can still carry on their evil activities on earth. See Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 445–5 1; Buswell, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 134.

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One must not deny or minimize the significance of Christ's defeat of Satan and demons. It represents an understanding of the Atonement that is very important to the New Testament (1 Cor. 2:6–8; Col. 2: 15; Heb. 2: 14).<sup>61</sup> This victory of the Cross over demonic forces was prefigured in Jesus' observation of Satan's fall from heaven like a bolt of lightning during the first major mission of Christ's disciples in the world (Luke 10: 18). Later, the apostolic proclamation of the gospel harkened back to Jesus' activity by the power of the Spirit to do good and to heal "all who were under the power of the devil" (Acts 10:38). The same Spirit who worked through Jesus' ministry was poured out on the believers on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Now the Church could act as a Spirit-empowered messianic community, in which persons could encounter the crucified and risen Lord and be set free for a life directed by God.

Paul referred to the demonic forces defeated by Christ as the "rulers of this age" (1 Cor. 2:6–8) or as "powers and authorities" (Col. 2: 15). He described these forces of darkness in the language of oppressive political structures. As already noted, the Book of Daniel implies that demonic forces ("prince of Persia," Dan. 10) can be at work in oppressive political systems. Jesus' saying about the demons who leave a person only to return in greater number to this "clean" but empty life certainly refers to the fate of Israel in His day, especially in the light of the pharisaical emphasis on ritual purity without true righteousness (Matt. 12:43–45).

Such insights do not mean that political realities are possessed by demons in their opposition to God, nor that such opposition can be understood and fought merely in the context of the demonic. Furthermore, there is not enough biblical support to justify the simplistic and speculative assumption that every region or political system has its own demon. But the corporate power in our world in its opposition to God, particularly in oppressing the poor and outcasts of society, certainly has the forces of darkness behind it.

By His death on the Cross, Jesus destroyed "him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—" and set "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Heb. 2:14–15; cf. 1 John 3:8). "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumph-

<sup>61</sup>G. Aulen, *Christus Victor, An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, translated by A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

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ing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15). The Cross, where Satan did his worst, proved to be his downfall. When Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" He was declaring the completion of His passion for our redemption and for His comprehensive victory over death and the forces of darkness headed by Satan.

During the early centuries, a belief developed that either between His death and resurrection or after His resurrection and ascension Jesus descended into hell to declare His triumphant victory, not only over death, but also over the power of the devil and the threat of final alienation from God that surrounds death. In A.D. 390 Rufinus added the phrase "He descended into hell" to the Apostles' Creed. No one else included it in any other version until A.D. 650,<sup>62</sup> although it was probably in the *Athanasian Creed* by the fifth century.<sup>63</sup>

In modern times many scholars believe there is sufficient scriptural evidence for the idea that Christ's defeat of the forces of darkness did indeed involve His descent into hell and that from such depths He rose victoriously in His resurrection to ascend to His place at the Father's right hand of power.<sup>64</sup>

Many Roman Catholics formerly interpreted this not as a descent to hell, but as a descent to release Old Testament saints from what they called a *limbus patrum*, a sort of resting place where they were kept until Christ's atonement was complete.<sup>65</sup> This view limits for many the symbolic significance of the descent as a proclamation of Christ's total victory over evil and despair on the Cross. Calvin interpreted Christ's descent as a further reference to His sufferings on the Cross. Yet, as we have noted, Christ's passion for our redemption

<sup>62</sup>Rufinus may have believed that "hell" was symbolic of the grave. See Wayne Grudem, "He Did Not Descend Into Hell: A Plea For Following Scripture Instead of the Apostles' Creed," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (March 1991): 103. There was, however, strong patristic support for Christ's descent into hell as the realm of the dead prior to the addition of this confession to the creed.

<sup>63</sup>David P. Scaer, "He Did Descend to Hell: In Defense of the Apostles' Creed," *Evangelical Theological Society Journal*, 93.

<sup>64</sup>Matt. 12:22–32; Mark 3:22–30; Luke 11:14–23; Acts 2:27; Rom. 10:6–7; Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:14–15; 1 Pet. 3:18–22; 4:6.

<sup>65</sup>In the early centuries there was some disagreement as to whether the *Hades* into which Christ descended was the realm where lost souls were held captive by forces of darkness or, on the basis of an interpretation of Luke 16, "Abraham's bosom" (KJV). See Jeffrey B. Russell, *Satan, the Early Christian Tradition* (London: Cornell University Press, 1981), 117. Roman Catholic theologians no longer hold to the idea of a *limbus patrum*. See chap. 18, p. 614.

was completed on the Cross. Luther took the descent to mean that after Jesus rose He went to hell in His glorified body, united with His soul, to announce His victory. The New Testament confession of the descent, however, would seem to place it between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

It would seem that *badēs* (Acts 2:27) and the “deep” (*abusos*, Rom. 10:7) would have meant more to the first-century mind than merely physical tombs. The New Testament teaches that the destiny of those redeemed by God is to be in heaven with Christ (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21–24). By way of contrast, *badēs*, as the realm of the unrighteous dead, is associated, at least in its destiny, with the place of final judgment, the lake of fire (Rev. 20: 14). The “deep,” or abyss (*abussos*), is also associated with alienation from God (Rom. 10:7; see also Rev. 20: 1–3).

Some take Christ’s descent into the “lower, earthly regions” (Eph. 4:9) to refer to the same declaration of victory over demonic forces noted above.<sup>66</sup> The metaphor Paul uses appears to be that of a triumphant victory march, a fitting description of the Resurrection.<sup>67</sup> The “captives” Jesus lead “in his train” (Eph. 4:8) might then be a reference to the enemy. The giving of gifts unto people would complete the metaphor, referring to the customary sharing of the spoils of war with the victors.

It is not certain whether Christ’s preaching to the “spirits in prison”<sup>68</sup> through the Spirit is also a reference to the de-

<sup>66</sup>In favor of viewing Eph. 4:9 as implying Christ’s descent into the demonic underworld is Donald Bloesch, “Descent into Hell,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 313–15. Markus Barth, *Ephestians 4–6, The Anchor Bible*, eds. W. F. Albright, D. N. Freedman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 477, identifies the descent with Christ’s incarnation and crucifixion. Another example of an opposing view is J. M. Robinson, “Descent into Hades,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick, et. al., vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 826–28. See also Grudem, “He Did Not Descend into Hell,” 108.

<sup>67</sup>Others take Eph. 4:9–10 as a parenthesis identifying the one who “ascended on high” (Ps. 68: 18) as the same Jesus who descended to the lower earthly regions, that is, to the earth itself (as in Ps. 139: 1.3–1 5; Isa. 44:23). Consequently, the “gifts” of Eph. 4:8 are the gifts of v. 11, people taken captive by the risen Christ and given as gifts to “prepare God’s people for works of service” (v. 12). On this basis, Paul frequently calls himself a captive, that is, a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Most slaves were people taken captive in war and then given by the conqueror as gifts to his friends.)

<sup>68</sup>Some take these “spirits” to be demonic spirits. However, the context shows Peter was talking about people who opposed the gospel (1 Pet. 3:14,16).

scent into *badēs* (1 Pet. 3: 18–20).<sup>69</sup> Some take the context and wording of the passage as suggesting the activity of Christ between His death and resurrection.<sup>70</sup> One should be cautious, however, not to conclude any more from this passage than the fact that Christ’s victory on the Cross penetrated every dimension of reality, including the realm of despair and rebellion in *badēs*.<sup>71</sup>

The lack of clarity or elaboration of the New Testament passages referred to above should caution one against creating elaborate scenarios of Jesus’ battle with and victory over demons in hell, or any elaborate speculations about the realm of the dead at the time of Christ.\* It should also warn against the dogma of universalism that simply assumes the deliverance of all the dead from Hades. The descent of Christ into

<sup>69</sup>First Peter 4:6 also speaks of the gospel preached to the dead. But the relation of this verse to the “descent into hell” passage of 3:19–22 is highly questionable. Peter was probably using the term “dead” in 4:6 as a symbol of the unredeemed. Just as Naomi spoke of how Ruth and Orpah dealt with the dead, but was referring to how they dealt with them while still alive, so Peter was probably referring in 4:6 to the gospel that was preached while people now dead were still alive. They were given the message because there is a judgment day coming (1 Pet. 4:5). In any case, one cannot use 4:6 to justify a second chance after death (Luke 16:19–31; Heb. 9:27).

<sup>70</sup>Others point out that Peter spoke of the fact that it was the Spirit of Christ in the prophets who pointed them to the circumstances of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow (1 Pet. 1:11). Therefore, in v. 19 the meaning may be that Christ, through the Spirit, preached to the people in Noah’s day by the mouth of Noah (2 Pet. 2:5).

<sup>71</sup>Note Bo Reicke’s discussion of this passage, *The Epistle of James, Peter, and Jude, The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 109. According to Bo Reicke, Peter describes Christ’s proclamation in the underworld to the evil rulers from the time of Noah as an example to the Church. If Christ proclaimed His victory even to such hopelessly lost and rebellious rulers, how much more should the Church preach to ruling authorities of its day who may yet repent. The phrase “through whom” of 1 Pet. 3:19 (*en bō*) should be translated “on which occasion,” associating the preaching to the spirits in prison with the time of Christ’s death.

<sup>72</sup>Some, for example, E. W. Kenyon, take the fact that “God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:2 1) to mean Jesus became a sinner and had to be born again in hell to save us. However, the Hebrew word for sin also means a sin offering. Jesus was at every point the spotless Lamb of God, and it was our sins that were laid on Him. Any teaching that Jesus had to do anything but shed His blood and die on the cross for our redemption is contrary to Scripture. At the cross, Satan did his worst and failed. On the cross, Jesus cried, “It is finished” (John 19:30), and said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). His death put the new covenant into effect (Heb. 9:26; 10:10–14).

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Hades has a place in Christian confession merely as a reminder that God conquered the forces of darkness and all possible depths of despair through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If God did not abandon Jesus Christ, the firstfruits of redemption, in the clutches of death and Hades, this God will not abandon the redeemed either (1 Cor. 15:20–28).

Some have associated the role of Satan as the adversary with the role of the Law in condemning sinners and exposing their inability, apart from God's grace, to be saved. Galatians 4:3 refers to the Galatians' former slavery to "basic materials of the world." The term for "basic materials" (*stoicheia*) is then translated as "elemental spirits," with the thought that the Jewish attempt at self-justification through the Law and the pagan worship of cosmic deities were both a form of bondage to demonic spirits (Gal. 4:8–9).<sup>73</sup> But there is no evidence of anything demonic behind the term *stoicheia* in the context of Galatians 4. Some have argued that Paul most likely used this term to refer to those religious teachings used by sinful humanity in an effort to gain salvation through works.<sup>74</sup>

Even though demonic spirits are not directly implied by Paul in the context of bondage to such human rebellion, this bondage keeps the rebellious within the hold of the powers of darkness. Jesus died to liberate people from all bondage and to offer them salvation by the grace and power of God.

Christ's death dealt a fatal blow to Satan; nevertheless, he is still able to prowl about like a lion looking for prey (1 Pet. 5:8). The devil hindered Paul's missionary work (2 Cor. 12:7; 1 Thess. 2: 18). He blinds the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor. 4:4) and fires "flaming arrows" against the redeemed in their efforts to serve God (Eph. 6:16). One's defense and victory in such cases come from being "strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (6:10), and from wearing the armor of God (truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, prayer, and the Word of God), using the shield of faith to extinguish all those "flaming arrows" (6: 11–17).<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup>G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers, a Study in Pauline Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

<sup>74</sup>G. Delling, "STOICHEION," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 684; David R. Bundrick, "TA STOICHEIA TOUCOSMOU (GAL 4:3)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (September 1991): 35.3–64.

<sup>75</sup>This shows that all those flaming arrows come from outside.

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*The* empty tomb and the Holy Spirit's work in and through believers are the guarantees of the ultimate triumph of God's grace. Satan will indeed try to deceive the multitudes and will make a final stand against God, but the attempt will be futile (2 Thess. 1:9–12; Rev. 19:7–10).<sup>76</sup>

## THE TENSION OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND CONFLICT WITH SATAN

If God is truly sovereign over all, how can anyone, including Satan, really oppose God? Or, if God's grace is sure to triumph over evil, why do we need to fight for the victory of grace in such a graceless world?

Such tensions may be resolved in the context of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is because the gospel proclaims a Kingdom that does indeed reign supreme over the world, but has not yet fulfilled its redemptive goal in the world. The sovereign reign of God has, in other words, both a present and a future dimension. God's lordship belongs to God as Lord; and yet, His lordship must redeem the creation through conflict and triumph. Thus, a believer can speak confidently of the triumph of God's grace in Christ at the same time he must battle for the victory.

God is the infinitely superior One in the war that Satan wages against Him. (Do not the demons believe and shudder Dames 2: 19?) And God's grace is prior to, and makes possible, any battles by believers. Therefore, it is only by the liberty of *that* grace that believers have the Lord's armor and can do battle (Eph. 6: 10–17). *The* reality of God's kingdom as present now, but not yet fulfilled, means that God's sovereign reign as Lord will include satanic opposition, an opposition that we must take with utmost seriousness in our service for God. We cannot be passive or indifferent.

How could God, as the sovereign Lord, permit such satanic opposition to exist? Why must the final defeat of satanic forces be delayed until God's sovereign lordship can conquer through the triumph of Christ and a Church empowered by the Spirit? One cannot answer such questions by stating that God is powerless to do anything more than wait. This would contradict what the Scriptures maintain about God's absolute sovereignty. Neither can we answer such questions by stating that the satanic opposition and destruction are part of God's will for humanity. This would contradict the sovereign Lord's love and redemptive purposes for humanity. Such questions

<sup>76</sup>See chap. 18, pp. 622, 631.



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have to do with "theodicy" (justifying God in the face of evil and suffering). Introducing the complexities of the problem in the context of this chapter is not possible,<sup>77</sup> but a few words of explanation are in order.

Historically, the Church has stressed two related points relevant to a biblical orientation for dealing with the above questions. First, God has created humanity with the freedom to rebel and to become vulnerable to satanic opposition. God has allowed satanic opposition to exist to test humanity's free response to God. Second, God wills to triumph over satanic opposition, not only for believers, but also through them. Therefore, the triumph of God's grace has a history and a development.

This triumph is not primarily dependent on human cooperation for its progress and accomplishment, but it does include the history of humanity's faithful response to God in its strategic fulfillment. This means that God's allowance of satanic opposition is provisional and is not part of God's redemptive will for humanity. To the contrary, God's redemptive will is determined to triumph over all satanic opposition.<sup>78</sup>

God is not secretly behind the works of Satan, although God may use those works to accomplish redemption. God is clearly on the side of liberation and redemption from all that destroys and oppresses. This does not answer all questions about the how's and why's of evil and suffering in the world. We have no final answers to such questions. But we do have assurance of final redemption in Christ.

## THE PLACE OF SATAN AND DEMONS IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Is there a dignified place for demonology in Christian theology? The poet Howard Nemerov stated, "I should be very chary in talking about the Devil, lest I be thought to be invoking him."<sup>79</sup> Barth said he would give only a quick, sharp "glance" to the area of demonology, lest he grant more weight and attention to the demonic than is absolutely necessary.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup>Note, J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Collins, 1968), and Shilling, *God and Human Anguish* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977).

<sup>78</sup>Note, Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3:2: 599; 3:3: 519.

<sup>79</sup>D. G. Kehl, "The Cosmocrats: The Diabolism in Modern Literature," in *Demon Possession: A Medical, Historical, Anthropological, and Theological Symposium* ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1976), 111.

<sup>80</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3:3:519.

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On the other hand, spiritual warfare and deliverance ministries that focus attention on the realm of the demonic abound. Some have pointed the Church to a neglected area of spiritual and theological concern and have attempted to work within a biblical view of demonology. Others, however, have clearly transgressed the legitimate place that the Bible gives to the demonic.<sup>81</sup>

A certain glory and legitimacy are often granted to the devil. In such ministries, God's whole redemptive activity is narrowed to destroying the devil, so that all other areas of theology are discussed in the light of demonology.

In such a distorted theology, salvation is largely deliverance from the devil. Sanctification is largely resisting or being delivered from the devil. Complex human and social evils are elevated to the sphere of conflict with demons, while the human dimension of such problems and the graced human means of achieving liberation and healing are neglected. Christ is viewed as merely God's tool for defeating the devil. The Spirit is merely the empowerment one needs to fight the devil. Without the devil, such preaching and theologizing would be left an empty shell.<sup>82</sup>

The grotesque form of this belief is found in the assumption that demons can possess and dominate Christians who are disobedient or in greater need of deliverance. To harmonize this assumption with the clear biblical teaching that Christians belong to Christ and are directed in life primarily by God's Spirit (Rom. 8:9-17), an unbiblical dichotomy is made between body and soul, allowing God to possess the soul, while demons control the body.<sup>83</sup> However, the Bible teaches that a loyalty so radically divided is impossible for the person of true faith (Matt. 7:15-20; 1 Cor. 10:21; James 3:11-12; 1 John 4:19-20).

This is not to say that Christians are invulnerable to genuine

<sup>81</sup>Barth accused Martin Luther of speaking too much about the devil and points out that the demons desire Christians to hold them in awe. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3:3:519ff.

<sup>82</sup>Novelist Frank Peretti has granted artistic support for such a theological distortion by viewing the world and human destiny as dominated by the results of warfare with demons. See R. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul, and Peretti," *Pneuma*, 13:1 (Spring 1991): 33-64.

<sup>83</sup>Arguing for the possibility of demons possessing a Christian's body is, for example, Derek Prince, *Expelling Demons* (Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Derek Prince Pub., n.d.). For an opposing view, note Opal Reddin, ed., *Power Encounter: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, Mo.: Central Bible College Press, 1989), 269-77.



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conflict with, or even momentary defeat by, the sinful nature or the lies of Satan. But any state of domination or possession by way of either human weakness or demonic activity contradicts the biblical contrast between the life of the Spirit and the life of the flesh (Rom. 6 through 8). Furthermore, the Bible does not assume a radical dualism of soul and body, so that they might function independently of each other. Believers, whether one considers man a body or a soul, are whole persons, with the body being a temple (Gk. *naos*, "inner sanctuary") of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Lastly, God has promised to keep believers safe from the harm of Satan (1 John 5:18).

Jesus prayed for the safety of believers from the evil one (Matt. 6:13; John 17:15), but only in the broader and weightier context of an intimate participation in knowing God and fellowshiping with God as "our Father" (Matt. 6:9; John 17:1–3).

The fascination of Jesus' disciples with their authority over demons was countered by Jesus' admonition not to rejoice in power over demons but to rejoice rather that their names were written in heaven (Luke 10:17–20).

The New Testament's accent is on the glory of God and life with God, not on the enemy's attempts to oppose them. In fact, the trials and suffering of this age "are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

Note also that the Bible does not view the opposition to God solely in the context of demonology. The Gospels pay as much attention to the hindrances to Jesus' **ministry** from human stubbornness and disobedience as to the external attacks of Satan. Although Satan and the forces of darkness stand behind such human disobedience, Jesus declared that the human opposition to His ministry fulfilled the works of the devil (John 8:44). Later, Paul said that the "ruler of the kingdom of the air" is at work through "those who are disobedient" (Eph. 2:2). This does not mean that all disobedience to God is a response to direct demonic temptation. But it does mean that the kingdom of darkness is served, and its purposes are accomplished, through human disobedience.

The New Testament places sin and death as enemies in their own right alongside the forces of darkness (Rom. 8:1–2; 1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 1:18). Paul names death, not Satan, as the final enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:24–26). Sin and death may be the indirect result of Satan's work, but they are the direct result of human actions. Adam and Eve, not Satan,

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brought sin and death into the world. Satan is indeed the tempter (1 Thess. 3:5), but each person is tempted when, "by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed" (James 1:14). Satan is the liar (John 8:44), the accuser (Rev. 12:10), the thief, and the murderer (John 10:10). Yet, he can commit none of these acts effectively without human participation, even initiative. A heavy accent on the role of demons tends to evade human responsibility.

The New Testament devotes as much, if not more, attention to the believer wrestling with his own fallen condition (as "flesh" before God in a fallen world cursed by sin and death) as it does to his wrestling with demons (Rom. 8; 2 Cor. 10:4–6; Gal. 5). *Those* who make every temptation or trial a direct battle with the devil need to look in the mirror to discover who their most significant opponent really is.

Yet, does not evil leave a morally sensitive person at a loss for words to describe the "secret power" of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:7)? Does not the serpent of Genesis 3 stand as the source of the seduction of a humanity made for God and not for evil? Is not evil incomprehensible without this demonic seduction at its origin?

The same may be said of death. Hebrews 2:14 states that Christ died to "destroy him who has the power of **death**—that is, the devil." The most sinister quality of death as an enemy to humanity is not that humans must cease to live as physical beings, but that death brings a deep spiritual despair and a further alienation from God in *badēs*. Notice the coupling of death with *badēs* in Revelation 1:18 as being conquered together by Christ. Indeed, does not humanity's fear of death imply that death without Christ is under Satan's power and therefore associated with the despair of Hades (Heb. 2:14)?

All of the above does not mean that Satan has any power greater than the power of deception and falsehood. If one simply resists the devil through the power of God's grace, will the devil not "flee" like the coward he is (James 4:7)? Satan's power is found in his success at deceiving humanity into accepting his false claims concerning his position and rights as god of this age. Contrary to what some might think, Jude 9 shows no respect for Satan in the angelic hesitation to bring a slanderous accusation against him. The angel Michael held back any accusation based on his own authority in order to say, "The Lord rebuke you!" Any rejection of Satan's deceptive claims can come only from God's authority

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and grace, not from one's own self-generated wisdom or **authority**.<sup>84</sup>

Our wisest response to Satan's false, deceptive claims is to deny them, and to do so only through the quick, sharp "glance" that the theologian Karl Barth gave them in the greater light of God's truth and grace. But there seems to be a hidden assumption by many in the deliverance ministries that Satan is really defeated by those who know him best. Detailed speculations are offered about the organization and characteristics of demons and how they relate to human governments and individual lives. Elaborate practices of binding the demonic powers are carried out.

Yet when reading the Bible, one is struck with the total absence of such speculations and practices. God's Word encourages withstanding and resisting the deceptive forces of darkness, not studying and binding **them**.<sup>85</sup> The Bible makes no effort to better acquaint us with the devil. Its sole focus is on our getting better acquainted with God and an accompanying resistance to Satan's clamoring for our attention. Submitting to God and resisting the devil is our guidance from James 4:7.

The Bible simply does not give much information on Satan and demons. It hints at a fall **of Satan** and demons from heaven (**Jude 6**; Rev. 12:7–9). Some have speculated that the Old Testament describes this fall in Isaiah 14:12–20<sup>86</sup>; however, the meaning of this passage is unclear, being perhaps no more than a poetic rebuke to the "king of Babylon" (14:4).<sup>87</sup> **The when and how of this fall is nowhere explicitly defined. The fact is that the Bible's purpose in dealing with Satan and demons is to affirm God's redemptive purpose and from that to deny the works and claims of Satan.**

We **must admit, however, that the sciences have led to an**

<sup>84</sup>A notion of satanic rights was supported by the "ransom" theory of the Atonement advocated by certain early and medieval Latin theologians of the West and by Origen in the East. See chap. 10, p. 339. Some medieval theologians also attempted to explain Satan's defeat by holding that God had "tricked" him with a ransom that resulted in his destruction. Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 47; Russell, *Satan*, 192ff, 2 15.

"Note Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare," 59.

"The Hebrew for "morning star" (v. 12, NIV) was translated "Lucifer" in the Latin Vulgate, from which it was borrowed by the KJV, instead of being translated from the Latin.

<sup>87</sup>Note he is identified as a man who did not get a proper burial (Isa. 14: 16–20). This fits Tiglath-Pileser (also called Pul), who took the title "king of Babylon" two years before he died.

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understanding of the genuinely human dimension of many individual and social problems, as well as the kinds of **strategies** that may be used to solve them. There is nothing necessarily contrary to the Scriptures in much of this, since the Bible does recognize our fallen condition as a human **condition**, apart from any consideration of direct demonic **influence**. In the Church one must be open to medical, psychiatric, and sociological insights. God does offer miraculous solutions to supernatural problems. God also works providentially through human solutions to human problems. One dare not label all problems as demonic and advocate the illusion that they may all be solved by casting out demons.

Furthermore, many of the symptoms described in the Bible as demonic parallel symptoms that have been isolated today as pathological and human. This makes distinguishing between the demonic and the pathological a complex task. But the Bible does distinguish between illness and demonic possession (Mark 3:10–12). So today, one must distinguish between psychiatric cases and possible demonic possession. This distinction is important because, as theologian Karl Rahner pointed out, exorcisms of pathological patients may actually aggravate their delusions and make their condition more **acute**.<sup>88</sup>

Much discernment is needed in detecting what serves the kingdom of darkness and what does not, since Satan can mask himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Not only are his purposes served where one expects (for example, in severe and utterly inexplicable cases of evil or torment), but they are also sometimes served in the most noble deeds and religious aspirations. Pride, idolatry, prejudice, and harmful phobias can surface in religiosity and patriotism and be defended by what may appear to be noble doctrines and practices. Slavery and racism, for example, have been defended by persons claiming to support the most noble religious and patriotic causes. Constant soul searching is necessary if the Church is to properly deny the works of the devil and **affirm** the renewal of the Spirit of God in and through the Church.

The denial of Satan in certain baptismal rites is rooted in the ancient practice of renouncing the devil at baptism to

<sup>88</sup>Rahner's view is discussed in, J. P. Newport, "Satan and Demons: A Theological Perspective," in *Demon Possession, a Medical, Historical, Anthropological and Theological Symposium*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), 342.

then affirm Christ as **Lord**.<sup>89</sup> Every believer from the moment of conversion implies the same commitment to the lordship of Christ. In efforts to serve the sovereign Lord in the Church and in society through words and deeds of liberating grace, one can be conscious all the while that one is participating in the destruction of the murderer and the robbing of the thief. We deny and expose the lie that is personified in Satan and his legions every time we embrace and obey God's truth in Christ and in the power of the Spirit. There is no more effective way of resisting the demonic enemy than this.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the interpretations of Origen (footnote 84), Thomas Aquinas (footnote 17), Martin Luther (footnote 21), the Cabalists (footnote 38), Irenaeus (footnote 40), and Paul Tillich (footnote 25) regarding the nature or role of angels. Why are these views problematic? How can their **hermeneutical** difficulties be solved or avoided?
2. Based on your own thorough investigation of **Colossians** 1: 15-18, discuss the proper place of angels.
3. List some common beliefs about angels found in your community and church. How would you correct or enhance each belief you have listed?
4. Angels are servants. How should their example affect our motivation to serve God?
5. What does the Bible show that angels can and will do for us today?
6. What does the Bible show that we cannot expect angels to do for us today?
7. How is the Old Testament approach to demonology **different** from ancient pagan views of evil spirits? Discuss this in relation to God's sovereignty.
8. How does Christ's victory over the forces of darkness **fulfill** what the Old Testament teaches about demons?
9. Since Christ won the victory over the forces of darkness, is there still a real opposition by demonic forces against believers and the will of God? If so, why? If so, how do we have the power to withstand and resist their purposes?
10. Can Christians be possessed by demons? Explain.
11. What is wrong with the idea that Satan's claims are legitimate? How has the ransom theory of the Atonement

<sup>89</sup>Russell, *Satan*, 102-3.

**affirmed** satanic claims and rights? What is wrong with such affirmations of satanic rights?

12. What role does human responsibility play in our understanding of Satan and of what opposes God's will?

13. Do human and scientific insights into our problems have any legitimate place among believers? Why?

14. What are reasons for a certain fascination with the demonic in the Church and in culture? What is wrong with this? What is the real place of demonology in Christian theology?

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

# ***The Creation of the Universe and Humankind***

***Timothy Munyon***

The Bible was written over a **period** of about fifteen hundred years by perhaps forty different writers. Yet God's saving activity, and humankind's response to it, seems to be a common thread woven through all of Scripture. Therefore, we will keep this motif in view as we approach the Bible's teaching on the creation of the universe and the nature of human beings.

### **THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE**

The Scriptures clearly portray God as a purposeful Being. Proverbs 19:2 1 observes, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the **LORD's** purpose that prevails." God declares, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (Isa. 46:10; cf. Eph. 3:10–11; Rev. 10:7).<sup>1</sup>

The study of creation must therefore seek to analyze God's purpose in creation (i.e., the universe is what it is because God is who He is\*). And what is God's purpose in the creation of the universe? Paul explains, "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 will have reached their **fulfillment—to** bring all things in heaven

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\*Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 497. He explains this mystery of Rev. 10:7 as God's "purposes for man and the world as revealed to both OT and NT prophets."

<sup>2</sup>H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, vol. 1 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940), 447.

and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:9–10).

Moreover, God's purpose for humanity is inseparable from His overall purposes for His creation (i.e., we human beings are what we are because God is who He is). The apostle Paul, in speaking of our future immortal existence with God, states, "It is God who has made us *for this very purpose* and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor. 5:5).

There is an indissoluble unity, then, between the Bible's teachings about God, the creation of the universe, and the creation and nature of humankind. This unity stems from God's creative purpose. And God's purpose for His creation, and specifically for humanity, is captured by the familiar confession, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him for ever."<sup>3</sup>

#### GOD AS THE CREATOR

The biblical writers unhesitatingly ascribe the creation of the universe to God. They deem it suitable, therefore, to reverently give Him glory and praise as the Creator.

Old Testament writers routinely attribute the creation of the physical universe to God with the word *bara'*, "he created." The opening verse of Scripture declares, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1: 1). This succinct, summary statement anticipates the remainder of Genesis 1.<sup>4</sup> Introducing us to the subject of creation, Genesis 1: 1 answers three questions: (1) When did creation take place? (2) Who is the subject of creation? (3) **What** is the object of creation?

Genesis 1:1 opens by emphasizing the fact of a real beginning, an idea avoided in most ancient and modern religions and philosophies. "[B]ara'... seems to carry the implication that the physical phenomena came into existence at that time and had no previous existence in the form in which they were created by divine fiat."<sup>5</sup> In other words, prior to this moment nothing at all existed, not even a hydrogen atom.

<sup>3</sup>See T. Vincent, *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980 from 1674), 13.

<sup>4</sup>Bruce K. Waltke "The Literary Genre of Genesis, Chapter One," *Cruce* 27:4. (December 1991): 3.

<sup>5</sup>T. E. McComiskey, "'asa' in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 701.

Out of nothing (Latin *ex nihilo*), God created the heavens and the earth.

According to Genesis 1: 1, the subject of creation is "God." The word *bara'* in its most common Hebrew form is used only of God's activity, never of human "creative" activity.<sup>6</sup> Creation displays God's power (Isa. 40:26), majesty (Amos 4:13), orderliness (Isa. 45: 18), and sovereignty (Ps. 89: 11–13). As Creator, God should be recognized as omnipotent and sovereign. Anyone who abandons the biblical doctrine of creation diminishes the awe and reverence that are rightly due God for these attributes.

Genesis 1: 1 informs us that God created "the heavens and the earth." In the Old Testament, "the heavens and the earth" comprise the entirety of the "orderly, harmonious universe." Nothing exists that God did not create.

Old Testament writers also use the word *yatsar*, "form," "shape," to describe God's creative acts. For instance, this word aptly describes the "potter," someone who shapes, or forms, an object according to his will (Isa. 29:16). However, when used of divine agency,<sup>8</sup> the word appears to be employed in synonymous parallelism with *bara'*, indicating the same kind of divinely unique acts. Although we note that God "formed" the **first** man of the dust of the earth (i.e., He shaped the man from something that already existed), we would be taking **this** word beyond the Old Testament writer's intent to say *yatsar* opened the door to evolutionary processes.

Finally, Old Testament writers employ a third primary term when describing God's creative activity: '*asah*, "make." Like *yatsar* above, '*asah* generally has a much broader scope than the word *bara'*. However, when placed in a statement of creation parallel to *bara'* (Gen. 1:31; 2:2–3; 3:1; 5:1), there appears to be little difference in meaning between the two terms. Again, the term '*asah*, though at times broader in meaning than *bara'*, lacks sufficient flexibility to include the concept of evolution.

The New Testament writers were no less accustomed to

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., vol. 1, 127, *Bara'* everywhere ascribes creation to God (Gen. 1:27; 2:3; 5:1–2; Ps. 148:5; Isa. 42:5; 45:18) or calls Him Creator (Eccles. 12:1; Isa. 40:28).

<sup>7</sup>See Waltke, "Literary Genre," 3, where he indicates the Hebrew term "the heavens and the earth" is an example of what grammarians call a hendiadys, the use of two independent words connected by a conjunction to express one idea or concept (e.g., "old and Bray" in 1 Sam. 12:2).

<sup>8</sup>Gen. 2:7,8,19; Ps. 95:5; Isa. 45:18; Jer. 33:2.

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ascribing creation to God than their Old Testament counterparts. We cannot disregard the Old Testament's teaching on creation (because of its supposed primitive scientific status) without at the same time doing violence to the New Testament teaching. In fact, the New Testament cites as authoritative the first eleven chapters of Genesis no less than sixty times.<sup>9</sup> Topics discussed in these passages include marriage, Jesus' lineage, human depravity, functional domestic roles, the Sabbath, our immortality, the future recreation of the universe, and the removal of the curse in the eternal state. If the authority and facticity of Genesis' first eleven chapters fall, what are we to do with these doctrines in the New Testament?

It is evident that the New Testament writers viewed the Old Testament record as a reliable, factual account of what really happened. The primary New Testament term, *ktizō*, means "create," "produce," and occurs thirty-eight times when including derivatives. Colossians 1:16 affirms that by Christ all things were created, in heaven or on earth, visible or invisible. Revelation 4:11 finds the twenty-four elders laying their crowns before the Throne as an act of worship and ascribing creation to God. In Romans 1:25, Paul sadly observes that idolaters have "worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-who is forever praised." Moreover, the New Testament, like the Old Testament, points to God's power as Creator as a source of comfort when we are suffering (1 Pet. 4:19); the same God still providentially superintends His creation.

Finally, the Bible proposes that God sustains, or maintains, the universe. The Levites, in ascribing praise to God, acknowledged that God gives life to everything (Neh. 9:6). In speaking of the starry host, Isaiah 40:26 states, "Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing." The psalmist worships God because He preserves "both man and beast" (Ps. 36:6). Psalm 65:1-3 portrays God as governing the earth's meteorology and the production of grain.

In the New Testament, Paul states, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). In Colossians 1:17 Paul affirms of Christ, "He is before all things, and in him all

<sup>9</sup>Matt. 19:4; 23:35; Mark 10:6; 13:19; Luke 3:38; 17:26; John 8:44; Acts 14:15; Rom. 5:12-19; 8:20-21; 1 Cor. 11:3, 8-9; 15:21-22, 45-49; 2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 3:9; 5:31; Col. 1:16; Heb. 4:4; 11:4, 7; James 3:9; 1 Pet. 3:10; 2 Pet. 3:6; 1 John 3:12; Rev. 22:3.

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things hold together." Hebrews 1:3 declares that the Son is "sustaining all things by his powerful word." Numerous other Scripture passages point to God's direct superintendence and preservation of His creation.<sup>10</sup>

The triune God worked cooperatively in creation. Many Scripture passages attribute creation simply to God.<sup>11</sup> Other passages, however, specify Persons within the Godhead. Creation is attributed to the Son in John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17; and Hebrews 1:10. Moreover, Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13; 33:4; Psalm 104:30; and Isaiah 40:12-13 include the Holy Spirit's participation in creation.

We may ask, Did the individual members of the Godhead perform specific roles during creation? Paul states, "There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Cor. 8:6). Millard J. Erickson, after a survey of creation passages, concludes, "Although the creation is from the Father, it is *through the Son* and by the Holy Spirit."<sup>12</sup> We would caution against accepting statements that are more specific than this.

The Scriptures are clear that God created everything that exists. As briefly mentioned earlier, the Bible employs the phrase "the heavens and the earth" to embrace all of creation, the entire universe. In fact, the "heavens" and the "earth" are sometimes set in parallel statements comprising all of creation. Finally, at times the word "heavens" is used by itself to refer to the entire universe.<sup>13</sup>

The New Testament writers use the term *kosmos*, "world," as a synonym of the Old Testament "heavens and earth," to embrace the entire universe. Paul seems to equate *kosmos* with "heaven and earth" in Acts 17:24. Many other New Testament passages refer to God's creation of the "world" and include the universe.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the New Testament writers employed the term *ta panta*, "all things," to describe the scope of God's

<sup>10</sup>Pss. 104:30; 107:9; 145:15-16; 147:9; Matt. 5:45; 6:26; 10:29; John 5:17.

<sup>11</sup>Gen. 1:1; Ps. 96:5; Isa. 37:16; 44:24; 45:12; Jer. 10:11-12.

<sup>12</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 373.

<sup>13</sup>Gen. 1:1; 2:1, 4; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chron. 16:26; Pss. 8:3; 19:1; 33:6; 96:5; 102:25; 113:6; 136:5-6; Prov. 3:19; Isa. 42:5; 45:12, 18; 51:13, 16; Jer. 10:11; 32:17; Acts 4:24; Heb. 1:10; 2 Pet. 3:10; etc.

<sup>14</sup>Matt. 25:34; Luke 11:50; John 17:5, 24; Rom. 1:20; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8; 17:8.

creative activity (not always with the definite article). John 1:3 emphatically declares "all things" were made through the living Word. Paul speaks of Jesus Christ, through whom "all things" came (1 Cor. 8:6; see also Col. 1:16). Hebrews 2: 10 speaks of God, for whom and through whom "everything" exists. Then, in the Book of Revelation, the twenty-four elders render worship unto God because He created "all things" (4:11; see also Rom. 11:36).

Finally, the New Testament writers support the concept of creation *ex nihilo*, "out of nothing," with declarative propositions. In Romans 4:17 Paul speaks of the God who "gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were." Also, Hebrews 11:3 declares, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."

In summary, the Bible affirms that God created the entire universe. Everything "not-God" that exists owes its existence to the Creator. For this reason, the historic Church has upheld the doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation.

#### THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Creation was an act of God's free will. He was **free** to create or not to **create**.<sup>15</sup> Creation communicated God's goodness in a gracious act. Genesis 1 indicates that all of God's creative acts led up to the creation of Adam and Eve. Genesis 1 shows correspondence between days 1 and 4, 2 and 5, and 3 and 6. Days 1 and 2 each describe one creative act, and day 3 describes two distinct acts. Days 4 and 5 describe what **are** actually one creative act each, while day 6 describes two distinct creative acts. Progress and climax can be seen leading to the creation of humankind. All this shows God created according to a plan, which He carried out to its completion. This encourages us to believe He will carry out His plan of redemption to its consummation in the return of Jesus Christ. A relationship existed between grace and nature in those created and God's providential order.

In other words, God had an eternal, saving plan for His creature, and creation progresses toward this ultimate purpose. Prior to the creation of the universe, God purposed to

<sup>15</sup>Miley opposes those who contend that since God is good, and since it is good to create, God had a moral obligation to create. See John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 29697; also see R. A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 230.

have people fellowshiping with Him in a covenant relationship (2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:4). Thomas Oden observes, "The real story concerning creation is about the creature/Creator relationship, not about creatures as such as if creation were to be considered an autonomous, independent, underived value in **itself**."<sup>16</sup>

God had a Kingdom prepared for those who would respond to Him since (or "before") the creation of the world (Matt. 25:34). God's eternal purpose for His creation was **accomplished** through the mediating work of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:10–11), also planned before creation (Rev. 13:8). This divine, eternal purpose will be consummated "when the times will have reached their fulfillment" (Eph. 1: 10). Then, everything will be under one head, Jesus Christ. This passage provides us with the true end, or purpose, of creation: "that God should be known."<sup>17</sup>

In reflecting on that moment when God's **purpose** for His creation is fulfilled, Paul writes, "I consider that our present **sufferings** are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8: 18). He then points out how all creation groans, while waiting eagerly for that moment (8: 19–22). In fact, despite the blessings believers have received, they too groan as they wait eagerly for that event (8:23–25). But in the meantime, "We know that in **all things**<sup>18</sup> God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). The fact that human beings are capable of loving God implies that humankind was created with a free will.

Since all of creation points to God's saving purpose, we would expect to find in that divine purpose a provision for a salvation **sufficient** for the whole of humankind, including a universal call to salvation. God's saving purposes also resulted in the creation of a creature with a free **will**.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 198–99, 233. See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 263–65. The promise throughout the Old Testament looks forward to fulfillment in Christ. Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 233.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 568.

<sup>18</sup>Gk. *panta*, all things in heaven and earth. See pp. 215–16, 218.

<sup>19</sup>Muller, *Arminius*, 234, 257–58; *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. J. Nichols and W. R. Bagnall, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint 1977), 70, where Arminius says "the end of providence" points to, among other things, "the good of the whole." Also see p. 251, where providence is defined as God's evincing "a particular concern for all his [intelligent] creatures without any exception." See also vol. 2, 487.

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As a natural corollary to God's "very **good**"<sup>20</sup> creative work, creation irresistibly brings glory to God (Pss. 8: **1; 19: 1**).<sup>21</sup> The Scriptures also say that through the creation and establishment of the nation of Israel God would receive glory (Isa. 43:7; 60:21; 61:3). By extension, then, the New Testament **affirms** that all who avail themselves of God's plan will "be for the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1: **12,14**). Colossians 1:16 likewise affirms, "All things were created by him and for him." Furthermore, because of God's wondrous plan in creation, the twenty-four elders worship God and give Him the glory due His name (Rev. 4:11).

Finally, since God's purpose for His creation includes a time of consummation, we must bear in mind that this creation is transitory. Second Peter 3:10–13 describes a time when the heavens and the earth will dissolve, while Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21:1 speak of a new heaven and a new earth in fulfillment of God's **plan**.<sup>22</sup>

## THE BIBLICAL COSMOGONY AND MODERN SCIENCE

Some Bible critics maintain that there is no way to reconcile the biblical cosmogony (the view of the origin and development of the universe) with what the scientific community acknowledges today. Some Bible scholars, taking numerous figures of speech in the Old Testament literally, contend that the Hebrews believed the universe comprised a flat earth supported by colossal "pillars" over a watery abyss, called "the deep." The "firmament" (**sky**)<sup>23</sup> above was a solid arch and held back the waters (which occasionally fell through "windows" in the arch) above the earth. Some posit that the Old Testament characters believed the sun, moon, and stars were all on the same plane in this arch over the **earth**.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup>"Good" meaning well-suited to what God intended. Compare this with the usage of "good" to describe when a basketball goes through a hoop. ("The throw was good.")

<sup>21</sup>See Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), 38-40.

<sup>22</sup>See also Ps. 102:25–26; Isa. 13:10,13; 34:4; 51:6; Matt. 24:35; 2 Cor. 4:18; Rev. 20: 11. See chap. 18, pp. 635-37.

<sup>23</sup>Actually, "firmament" translates the Hebrew *raqi'a*, which is better translated "expanse," and refers to the earth's atmosphere where the clouds float and the birds fly.

<sup>24</sup>W. White, "Astronomy," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, M. Tenney, ed., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Corporation, 1975), 395.

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H. J. Austel, reasoning against this overliteral interpretation of Old Testament passages, explains, "The use of such figurative language no more necessitates the adoption of a pagan cosmology than does the modern use of the term 'sunrise' imply astronomical ignorance. The imagery is often **phenomenological**, and is both convenient and vividly **forceful**."<sup>25</sup>

Even when figurative language is taken into account, however, some difficulties remain. Where do dinosaur fossils fit into the biblical cosmology? Is there any evidence for a global Flood just a few thousand years before Christ? Is the earth really 4.5 billion years old? Most **evangelicals**, convinced that God's world will agree with God's Word, seek answers to these and other penetrating questions.

Generally speaking, evangelical Christians follow one of four models that endeavor to provide a harmonization between God's special revelation (the Bible) and His general revelation (what we observe in the universe today). These views are (1) theistic evolution; (2) the gap theory, also called the ruin/reconstruction view; (3) fiat creationism, also called the young-earth theory; and (4) progressive creationism, also called the age-day theory.

**We will** briefly examine all of the above, except for theistic evolution. Studying theistic evolution serves no useful purpose here because its proponents basically accept everything secular evolution proposes with the proviso that God was superintending the whole **process**.<sup>26</sup> Proponents of theistic evolution typically deny that *yatsar* and *'asah* are used in parallel **synonymity** in creation accounts, but rather include the concept of evolution over aeons of time (see the discussion on p. 217).

Furthermore, in our discussion, certain generalizations are necessary. Even though one writer within a certain model does not accurately represent the consensus in every detail within that model, we may, for the sake of this survey, allow that writer to generally represent the whole. In truth, no single author agrees with all of the conclusions drawn by others who support the same general view. Finally, many authors do not specify the identity of their general model.

<sup>25</sup>H. J. Austel, "*sbmb*" in *Theological Wordbook*, vol. 2, 935.

<sup>26</sup>For example, Oden argues, "Matter is created *ex nihilo* in a primary sense, radically given by God, but, as emergently developing through secondary causes. . . Once something is created out of nothing, then something else can be in due time created out of the prevailing and developing conditions," *The Living God* 265.



Theistic evolution aside for the moment, the other three views all agree that macroevolution, the transmutation of one type of organism into a more complex type of organism (i.e., evolution between species), has never taken place (such as a reptile changing into a bird, or a land mammal evolving into an aquatic mammal). However, all three views agree that microevolution, small changes within organisms (i.e., evolution within a species), has taken place (such as moths changing colors; the changing of beak lengths or plumage color in birds; or the variety we observe in human beings, all of whom descended from Adam and Eve). All three views agree that God should be worshiped as the Creator and that He supernaturally and without the interruption of any other cause or agency (by distinct, supernatural creative acts) created the **genetic** forebears of the major groups of plant and animal organisms we observe today. Finally, all three views agree that human beings derive their worth, or value, from being directly created in God's image. In the discussion that follows, the areas of agreement cited in this paragraph should be kept in the forefront.

**The Gap Theory.** Proponents of the gap theory contend that there was a "primitive creation" in the ageless past, referred to in Genesis 1: 1. Isaiah 45: 18 says, "This is what the **LORD** says—he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty [Heb. *tobu*], but formed it to be inhabited." This verse, say gap theorists, proves that Genesis 1:2 cannot be taken to mean God's original creation was without form [Heb. *tobu*] and void, but was a good, created order **containing** uniformity, complexity, and **life**.<sup>27</sup>

Gap theorists propose that Satan, an archangel prior to his fall, ruled this pre-Adamic earth in what originally was a perfect **reign**.<sup>28</sup> Then Satan rebelled, together with the cities and nations of pre-Adamic people, at which time the earth (his domain) was cursed and destroyed by a flood (the remains of which are referred to in Genesis 1:2, "the face of the deep,"

<sup>27</sup>G. H. Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages and Their Connection with Modern Spiritualism and Theosophy* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1876), 19–28. Also see F. J. Dake, *God's Plan for Man: The Key to the World's Storehouse of Wisdom* (Atlanta: Bible Research Foundation, 1949), 76. Other verses that gap theorists claim as support for a pre-Adamic period include Job 38; Pss. 8:3–8; 19:1–6; Prov. 8:22–31; John 1:3, 10; Acts 17:24–26; Col. 1:15–18; Heb. 1:1–12; 11:3; Rev. 4:11.

<sup>28</sup>Isa. 14:12–14; Jer. 4:23–26; Ezek. 28:11–17; Luke 10:18; 2 Pet. 3:4–8. Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages*, 36. Also see Dake, *God's Plan* 94, 118–24.

**KJV**). This verse points out that "the earth was without form, and void" (**KJV**). Arthur Custance contends that the phrase "without form and void" refers to a ruined, wasted void as a result of judgment and should therefore be rendered "a ruin and a **desolation**."<sup>29</sup>

Isaiah 24:1 and Jeremiah 4:23–26 are cited by gap theorists as evidence of this cataclysmic judgment of God (although these passages refer to future judgment). In the New Testament, Jesus' statement of Matthew 13:35, "from the foundation of the world" (**KJV**), is said to literally mean "from the overthrow of the **world**."<sup>30</sup> Second Peter 3:6–7 does not refer to Noah's flood (the context is said to be "the beginning of creation"), but refers to the first flood that destroyed the **pre-Adamic world**.<sup>31</sup>

Some proponents of the gap theory point to the Hebrew disjunctive accent *rebbia* introduced by medieval rabbis between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 to indicate a **subdivision**.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the Hebrew conjunction *waw* can mean "and," "but," or "now." Gap theorists choose to read verse 2 as "The earth became without form and void," but they admit the Bible does not tell us how much time elapsed while the earth **was in** this chaotic state, or gap, between Genesis 1: 1 and 1:2.<sup>33</sup> H. Thiessen says, "The first creative act occurred in the dateless past, and between it and the work of the six days there is ample room for all the geologic **ages**."<sup>34</sup>

The gap theorists claim, however, that eventually God began the creation process all over again in the neocreation, or reconstruction, of Genesis 1:3–3:1.<sup>35</sup> They also claim that the language of the "God created" passages allows for a re-creating or reshaping of the universe, and need not be restricted to a first-time event. Some gap theorists take the creative "days" as twenty-four-hour days. Others view the "days" of Genesis 1 as indefinitely long periods.

<sup>29</sup>Arthur C. Custance, *Without Form and Void: A Study of the Meaning of Genesis 1:2* (Brockville, Ontario: Doorway Publications, 1970), 116.

<sup>30</sup>Dake, *God's Plan*, 124. Actually, *katabolē* was used of sowing seed or making a down payment, as well as for "foundation" or "beginning." It is never used of overthrow. Usage, not derivation, determines meaning.

<sup>31</sup>Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages*, 83.

<sup>32</sup>Custance, *Without Form*, 14.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 122, 124. Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), 164.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages* 81. Dake, *God's Plan*, 134.

The wording of the KJV in Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and *replenish* the earth," is understood to suggest the earth had been full previously and now it required "*re-filling*."<sup>36</sup> Some point out that God employs the identical word when He commands Noah to "replenish" the earth in Genesis 9:1.

Moreover, the covenant in Genesis 9:13–15 (where God promises that "never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life") could suggest that God had employed this form of judgment on more than one occasion.

Early human fossils, together with dinosaur fossils, are taken to be evidence of this pre-Adamic world. The note in Scofield's Bible explains, "Relegate fossils to the primitive creation, and no conflict of science with the Genesis cosmogony remains." G. H. Pember states:

Since, then, the fossil remains are those of creatures anterior to Adam, and yet show evident tokens of disease, death, and mutual destruction, they must have belonged to another world, and have a sin-stained history of their own, a history which ended in the ruin of themselves and their *habitation*.<sup>37</sup>

The gap theory has several weaknesses, however. The Hebrew language does not allow for a gap of millions or billions of years between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. The language has a special form that indicates sequence and introduces that form beginning with 1:3. Nothing indicates sequence between 1:1 and 1:2. Therefore, 1:2 could well be translated, "Now [that is, at the time of the beginning] the earth was without form and empty of inhabitants."

Old Testament scholarship today generally recognizes that Genesis 1:1 functions as an introductory, summary statement of creation, upon which the rest of the chapter *elaborates*.<sup>38</sup> The verse does not describe a pre-Adamic world, but rather introduces the reader to the world that God created unformed and unfilled. That is, God did not create the earth with its present form of continents and mountains, nor did He create it with people already on it. On days one through three, God gave form to His creation; on days four through

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>37</sup>C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible: The Holy Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 4, note 3. Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages*, 35.

<sup>38</sup>Waltke, "Literary Genre," *Crux*, 3.

six, God filled it. The rest of the Bible looks back on these days as creation, not re-creation.

Furthermore, the verbs *bara'*, *yatsar*, and *'asah* are used in synonymous parallelism in various passages in Genesis and in other Bible books.<sup>39</sup> We must be cautious about assigning a vastly different meaning to any of these verbs simply because it better conforms to a certain harmonizing theory. Moreover, the KJV term "replenish" (1:28) does *not* mean "to refill" something that has already been filled previously; it simply means "to fill."<sup>40</sup> Also, the word "was" in verse 2 ("the earth was without form, and void") should not be translated "became" or "had become," as gap theorists contend.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the gap theory is self-defeating. In relegating all fossil-bearing strata to the pre-Adamic world to harmonize Genesis 1 with the scientific data, there remains no evidence for a global, aqueous catastrophe in Noah's day. Custance, the most technical proponent of the gap theory in the second half of the twentieth century, noted this *difficulty* and opted for a local Flood in Mesopotamia and the surrounding *vicinity*.<sup>42</sup> However, Genesis 6:7,13,17; 7: 19–23; 8:9,21; and 9:15–16 clearly say that the extent of the Flood was universal.

*Fiat Creationism* Another viewpoint among evangelical Christians today is fiat creationism, also known as the *young-earth* theory. Proponents of fiat creationism contend that the Scriptures should be interpreted at face value whenever possible in order to arrive at the original author's *truth-intention*.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, fiat creationists maintain that a general calculation may be performed *from* the date of the building of the temple in 1 Kings 6:1 (966–67 B.C.) *all the way back* to the creation of Adam on day six of creation week. Even though the biblical writers may not have intended that a mathematical calculation of this nature be performed, because the Word of God is *inerrant* the results will be accurate nonetheless. These

<sup>39</sup>W. W. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1976), 70–71.

<sup>40</sup>The KJV translates *mule* "as fill" about thirty-three times, including Gen. 1:22, and as "replenish" only twice.

<sup>41</sup>Fields, *Unformed*, 88–97. Verses cited by gap theorists to uphold the meaning "became" actually have a different Hebrew construction and context. Normally, when the word means "became," the Hebrew reads "was to" or uses an imperfect form.

<sup>42</sup>A. C. Custance, "The Flood: Local or Global?" *Doorway Papers No. 41* (Brookville, Ontario: Doorway Publications, 1989).

<sup>43</sup>J. C. Dillow, *The Waters Above: Earth's Pre-Flood Vapor Canopy*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 13.

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verses, then, seem to indicate the earth is no more than ten thousand years old at the most.\*\*

Fiat creationists contend that God created the universe by divine fiat (a supernatural, immediate decree). He did not require millions or billions of years to accomplish His purpose. Proponents of this viewpoint say the creative days in Genesis 1 are to be taken as days in the commonly understood sense because that is the way the Hebrews understood the term. Exodus 20: 11, explaining the rationale for keeping the Sabbath, states, "In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day" (also see Mark 2:27). It is inconceivable, say fiat creationists, that God would have communicated this to Moses if, in fact, God's creative acts in Genesis 1 actually spanned billions of years.<sup>45</sup>

The vast ages arrived at through various forms of radiometric dating are challenged by fiat creationists on several grounds. First, the following assumptions of radiometric dating can never be proven: ( 1) that God did not create the earth with radioactive sites with daughter elements (elements that are also the product of radioactive decay) already present; (2) that the rate of radioactive decay has been constant for 4.5 billion years; and ( 3) that there has been no leaching of parent or daughter elements over 4.5 billion years. Second, recent work in the area of nuclear physics seems to put a question mark over Uranium-238 dating. And third, radiometric dating is unreliable because, depending on the method used, the earth can be "proven" to be anywhere from one hundred to millions of years old. Hence, the various methods are grossly incongruent with one another.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, fiat creationists believe God created the entire biosphere in a mature, fully functioning state (with adult humans and animals; mature, fruit-producing trees; etc.), as well as the physical universe (the atmosphere, nutrient-rich

<sup>44</sup>Gen. 5:3-28; 6:1; 7:6; 1 1:10-26; 21:5; 25:26; 47:9; Exod. 12:40. Henry M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis of Modern Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 260; J. C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1961), 485.

<sup>45</sup>Morris, *Biblical Basis*, 117.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 261-62; Whitcomb, *Genesis Flood*, 334. R. V. Gentry, *Creation's Tiny Mystery*, (Knoxville: Earth Science Associates, 1986), 164. Morris, *Biblical Basis*, 477-80. Henry M. Morris and Gary E. Parker, *What Is Creation Science?* (San Diego, Calif.: Creation-Life Publishers, Inc., 1982), 252.

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soil with dead organic matter in it, starlight already reaching the earth, etc.). Henry Morris calls this the state of "functioning **completeness**."<sup>47</sup> Therefore, even though fiat creationists concur that mutations (which are nearly always harmful) and horizontal variations (e.g., dog varieties) take place, they deny that macroevolution has ever occurred.

Finally, fiat creationists maintain that most or all of the fossil-bearing strata were deposited during and immediately following Noah's flood, while the waters were **receding**.<sup>48</sup> Noah's flood was a global, catastrophic event precipitated by the upsurging of subterranean water together with the collapse of a water-vapor canopy that at one time encircled the globe. Therefore, the fossil strata actually serve a theological purpose: (1) they are a silent testimony 'that God will not allow unrepentant sin to continue unchecked indefinitely, and (2) they testify that God has destroyed the entire world in an act of judgment in the past, and He certainly has the ability to do so in the **future**.<sup>49</sup>

The flood-deposition model requires that dinosaurs and modern humans walked the earth at the same time. However, human beings of that era may not have been aware of the existence of the dinosaurs (just as most people today have never seen a bear or a big cat in the wild). The dinosaurs were herbivorous prior to the Fall, as were all animals on the earth (Gen. 1:29-30; cf. 9:1-3). In God's ideal, future Ringdom, animals will not devour each other (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25), possibly returning to their state prior to the Fall. Therefore, proponents of fiat creationism typically maintain that there was no death in God's "very good" creation prior to the fall of human beings in Genesis 3 (cf. Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22).<sup>50</sup> Fiat creationists also point out that all old-earth models must explain the pre-Fall carnage of their model.

Fiat creationism, like all other views, has its share of problems. Some proponents of the young-earth theory, eager to

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 274.

<sup>48</sup>Whitcomb, *Genesis Flood*, 116-1 7; 265, 291.

<sup>49</sup>The fossil distribution in the geological column is explained by three mechanisms: ( 1) pre-Flood ecological zonation (habitat elevation ), (2) animal mobility, and (3) hydrodynamic sorting due to each organism's respective specific gravity. Morris, *Biblical Basis*, 361-62.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 123. Whitcomb, *Genesis Flood*, 455-56. Adam was given the task of taking care of the Garden (literally, "to work it and keep it"), which likely would have included trimming the vegetation; however, this would have resulted in cell death only, not human death.

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buttress their argument with evidence, have a tendency to embrace findings uncritically. This was especially true a number of years ago. For instance, at one time Fiat creationists publicized the so-called human footprints fossilized in the Paluxy riverbed in Texas. Later research by creationists called into question the identity of these footprints, and published materials about them were subsequently **withdrawn**.<sup>51</sup> Other similar examples have included some young-earth creationists' acceptance of a shrinking sun and a recent decaying of the velocity of the speed of light by a factor of ten **million**.<sup>52</sup> In all fairness, much of the criticism and rejection of these purported young-earth evidences has come from within fiat creationism itself.

Another weakness of fiat creationism manifests itself in the tendency to employ an overly strict interpretation of Scripture. It does not recognize that Hebrew words can have more than one meaning, just as English words can. Nevertheless, some have used such methods to find support for young-earth **tenets**.<sup>53</sup> Another weakness, of course, is the marked disagreement with all forms of radiometric dating, as well as the rejection of nonradiometric data that seem to indicate an older earth.<sup>54</sup>

**Progressive Creationism** The final model proposed by

"These were featured in the film series *Origins: How the World Came to Be*. J. D. Morris, "Identification of Ichnofossils in the Glen Rose Limestone, Central Texas," in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Creationism* (Pittsburgh: Creation Science Fellowship, 1986), 89-90.

<sup>52</sup>H. J. Van Till, D. A. Young, and C. Menninga, *Science Held Hostage What's Wrong with Creation Science and Evolutionism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 47-48. Supported by T. Norman and B. Setterfield, "The Atomic Constants, Light, and Time," (Menlo Park, Calif.: SRI International, 1987). Denied by G. E. Aardsma, "Has the Speed of Light Decayed Recently?" *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 25 (June 1988): 40-41.

<sup>53</sup>For example, to produce evidence favorable to the pre-Flood coexistence of human beings and dinosaurs (a necessary tenet of fiat creationism), Henry Morris suggests the Hebrew word *tseph'oni* (which occurs in Prov. 23:32; Isa. 11:8; 59:5; Jer. 8:17 and is called *tsepha'* in Isa. 14:29) denotes a living fossil, perhaps a flying serpent (i.e., dinosaur?) of some kind. Morris, *Biblical Basis*, 359, 360. Hebrew scholars, on the other hand, consider *tsepha'* an onomatopoeic term (speaking the word makes a hissing sound not unlike that of a snake), appropriate to describe a snake, now identified as the Aegean viper (*Vipera xanthina*). William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), 310.

<sup>54</sup>Dan Wonderly, *God's Time-records in Ancient Sediments: Evidence of Long Time Spans in Earth's History* (Flint, Mich.: Crystal Press, 1977).

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**evangelicals** is progressive creationism, or the age-day theory. Proponents of this model contend that the creative days of Genesis 1 connote overlapping periods of indeterminate **time**.<sup>55</sup> Progressive creationists typically point to passages in the Old Testament where "day" meant something broader than a literal, twenty-four-hour day. They note that the events of Genesis 2:7-23 included the naming of all the animals and birds, which took place on the latter part of the sixth "day." They believe God created various plant and animal prototypes during different, overlapping stages, from which the processes of microevolution have produced the variety of flora and fauna we observe today.

Typically, progressive creationists reject macroevolution and observe that scientists are increasingly questioning "the legitimacy of extrapolating microevolutionary observations to macroevolution." They recognize also that the genealogies of the Bible were not intended for the construction of an accurate **chronology**.<sup>56</sup>

Many take Genesis 1 as having been written from the viewpoint of a hypothetical observer on earth. Verse 1 simply emphasizes that there was a real beginning and that God is the Creator of **all**. Verse 2 describes the earth as being without form (such as continents and mountains) and without inhabitants. That **is**, God did not create the earth with people already on it. Verses 3-4 speak of the creation of light, without noting the source. Verse 5 indicates that the earth was rotating on its axis. Verses 6-8 describe the formation of the atmosphere, with a cloud blanket lifted above the primeval ocean. Verses 9-10 describe the formation of various ocean basins and the first land mass or continent. Verses 11-13, in an economy of expression, discuss the initial distinct acts of the creation of life on the planet. Verses 14-19 provide an account of God's creation of the sun, moon, and stars, which would have **first** become visible to the earth due to at least a partial breakup of the cloud cover. The rest of Genesis 1 reveals the final distinct creative acts of God's progressive creation, all of which possibly took place with the passing of **time**.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup>R. C. Newman and H. J. Eckelmann, Jr., *Genesis One and the Origin of the Earth* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1977).

<sup>56</sup>P. P. T. Pun, *Evolution: Nature and Scripture in Conflict?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 228, 256-59.

<sup>57</sup>Ramm explains his view of progressive creation: "God creating directly and sovereignly *outside* of Nature now brings to pass that creation through the Holy Spirit who is *inside* Nature." Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954), 78.

Many progressive creationists believe that we are still living in the sixth creative **day**<sup>58</sup> and that God's Sabbath Day of rest will occur in the eternal state. Others believe we are in the seventh creative day because the word "rested" means "ceased," and no end is indicated for the seventh day in Genesis 2:3. Nothing in the Bible indicates that God is now creating new universes.

Progressive creationists say that because Christians are the stewards of God's creation (Gen. 1:28), and because "the heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19: 1), the pursuit of scientific knowledge should be "God-oriented," rather than "thing-oriented" or "knowledge-oriented." They reject the naturalistic, mechanistic, humanistic worldview that dominates contemporary science. While still rejecting those philosophies and speculations of naturalistic scientists, they are willing to reexamine the Scriptures if any previous interpretations of creation are based on theories that appear to be discredited by the data discovered by scientific **research**.<sup>59</sup>

Progressive creationists take the fossil record preserved in the geologic strata as a silent witness to rather long periods of time that have passed; yet they recognize that the fossils themselves descend in straight lines from the earliest **times**.<sup>60</sup> Concerning the young-earth theory, one progressive creationist says, "By its failure to deal with a wealth of relevant data, the recent creation-global flood model is unable ... to account for a wide diversity of geological **phenomena**."<sup>61</sup>

Progressive creationism has three major weaknesses. First, some of its proponents place too much stock in science's ability to recognize truth. For instance, Hugh Ross presents us with an alternative to the "single revelation view," in which the Bible is the only authoritative source of truth. Instead, he proposes "a dual revelation theology," in which the Bible (one form of revelation) is interpreted in the light of what science tells us (another equally authoritative form of **revelation**).<sup>62</sup> In short, progressive creationists who propose this approach tend to violate the Reformation's *sola scriptura*

<sup>58</sup>Newman, *Genesis One*, 85-86.

<sup>59</sup>Pun, *Evolution*, 238-39, 247.

<sup>60</sup>That is, an arrowworm in the Cambrian period was just as much an arrowworm as one now; an echinoderm in the Cambrian period was just as much an echinoderm as one now.

<sup>61</sup>Van Till, *Science Held Hostage*, 124.

<sup>62</sup>Hugh Ross, *The Fingerprint of God* 2d ed. (Orange, Cal.: Promise Publishing Co., 1991), 144-45.

principle. However, they do recognize that "Christian theism is in direct confrontation with the naturalistic monism of most evolutionists," and are also concerned about maintaining "the scriptural integrity of the Genesis account." Many progressive creationists reject the view of others within their camp who maintain that God's revelation in nature is just as authoritative as the **Bible**.<sup>63</sup>

The second weakness of progressive creationism is related to the first. When progressive creationists reject fiat creationism because it is based on what they view as obsolete science, there is a danger that the pendulum will swing too far the other way, resulting in an overdependence **hermeneutically** on present-day science. If that happens, it may produce a theological widow (i.e., a theological interpretation based on an abandoned scientific theory) in the succeeding generation.<sup>64</sup> Evangelical philosopher J. P. Moreland reminds us that science exists in a constant state of flux. What is viewed as true today may not be viewed in the same light fifty years from now. Moreland points out that science has changed so much in the past two hundred years that it is not accurate to speak of a **shift** in the way science looks at the world and provides solutions to its problems, but rather of the wholesale **abandonment** of old theories and old ways of seeing the world for completely new ones—even though the terminology remains unchanged. The same will happen to current **theories**.<sup>65</sup>

The third weakness of progressive creationism is that once the geologic strata are consigned to vast ages of gradual deposition, there remains no clear evidence for a universal Flood except in the Bible itself (Gen. 6:7,13, 17; 7:19-23; 8:9,21; 9:15-16). Many evangelical scientists who are progressive creationists hold to some kind of a local Flood explanation."

**Harmonizing the Views. If all** current attempts to harmonize the Bible and science are plagued with **difficulties**, why consider them? First, some questions need answering,

<sup>63</sup>Pun, *Evolution*, 247, 299. For example, Ross, *Fingerprint*, 144-45; Davis Young, *Christianity and the Age of the Earth*, 154-55.

<sup>64</sup>Larkin did this when he incorporated the 1796 nebular hypothesis of La Place into his interpretation of creation. Clarence Larkin *Dispensational Truth*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Clarence Larkin, 1918), 20-22.

<sup>65</sup>J. P. Moreland, *Christianity and the Nature of Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 195-98.

<sup>66</sup>Ramm, *The Christian View*, 162-168. Ramm depends too much on J. Laurence Kulp.

and we are convinced that because God is a consistent, truthful God (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; 1 John 5:20; Rev. 6:10), His Word will agree with His world. Second, the Bible itself seems to call on evidence to support belief (Acts 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:5-8; 2 Pet. 1:16; 1 John 1:1-3); it seems to suggest that one ought to have something intelligent to say about science and the Bible if asked (Col. 4:5-6; Titus 1:9; 1 Pet. 3:15; Jude 3).

Even with difficulties, the above evangelical attempts at harmonization do much to answer the questions of saint and sinner **alike**.<sup>67</sup> In summary form, six primary tenets on which proponents of all views agree include the following:

1. The spontaneous generation of life from nonlife is impossible. Those who attempt to create life in a test tube unfairly "stack the **deck**"<sup>68</sup> in their favor.
2. Genetic variations appear to have limits; they do not occur in all directions, and mutations are almost always harmful.
3. Speciation can best be explained in terms of ecological isolation, not macroevolutionary processes.
4. The fossil record contains gaps between major forms of living organisms-gaps that fail to provide any missing links (which should be there by the thousands if evolution were true).
5. Homology (the similarities observed in living organisms) can best be explained in terms of intelligent design and the purposeful reuse of patterns, rather than by an alleged common ancestry.

Therefore, the creationist discussion has generated several significant answers to questions being asked. However, it would be helpful if proponents of all views would recognize that the Scriptures simply do not speak in support of their models with the degree of specificity they would like. We must be careful to give full recognition to humankind's **fini-**tude and fallenness (Jer. 17:9; 1 Cor. 2: 14; Titus 1:15-16). Human thinking cannot be considered as a neutral, objective,

<sup>67</sup>See P. Davis and D. H. Kenyon, **OF Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biologic& Origins** (Dallas: Haughton Publishing Co., 1989); M. Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (London: Burnett Books Limited, 1985); C. Thaxton, W. L. Bradley, and R. L. Olsen, *The Mystery of Life's Origin: Reassessing Current Theories* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1984).

<sup>68</sup>I use this metaphor guardedly, here implying that truly random "chance" processes have been controlled so that the results will confirm the presuppositions.

and effective capacity in and of itself. As Eta Linnemann, a convert from the historical-critical interpretive method to saving faith, reminds us, "The necessary regulation of thought must occur through the Holy Scripture. It controls the thought process. Thought must subordinate itself to the Word of God. If **difficulties** crop up, it does not doubt God's Word but its own **wisdom**."<sup>69</sup> The Holy Spirit uses the Word, and this guiding principle will stand the test of time.

#### THE CREATION AND NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS

God's purposes cannot be separated from His creation. God created the universe with a view toward an everlasting relationship with humankind. The biblical writers, in unequivocal language, ascribe creation-everything "not-God" that exists--to the Triune God. Since God is Creator, He alone is worthy of our awe and worship. The fact that the same God presently sustains the universe provides us with confidence during the trials of life. Moreover, the biblical worldview (in light of creation) would **affirm** that the physical creation is basically orderly (making science possible) and beneficial to human existence. Furthermore, human beings themselves are "good" when they are in relationship to God. And finally, all of creation is moving toward the redemptive climax in Jesus Christ in the "new heavens and new earth."

#### THE BIBLICAL TERMINOLOGY FOR HUMANKIND

The Old Testament writers had numerous terms at their disposal when they described the human being. Perhaps the most important term, occurring **562** times, is '**adam**.'<sup>70</sup> This word refers to **humankind** (including both men and women) as the image of God and the climax of creation (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7). Humankind was created after special divine counsel (v. 26)—**after** the divine type (w. 26-27)—**and** was placed in an exalted position over the rest of creation (v. 28). The biblical writers employed the word '**adam**' to connote "hu-

<sup>69</sup>E. Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible, Methodology or Ideology? Reflections of a Bultmannian Turned Evangelical*, trans. R. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 111.

<sup>70</sup>Derived from '**adamah**, "ground," "soil," and '**edom**, "red-brown." Many take this to mean that Adam was created with a full set of inheritance factors (genes) that could separate into the various shades of skin color found today. See Walter Lang, *Five Minutes with the Bible and Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972 ), 44.

mankind” (as a noun) or “human” (as an adjective). Less frequently the word refers to the individual man, Adam.

Another generic term, found forty-two times in the Old Testament, is *’enosh*, a word that predominantly means “humankind” (Job 28:13; Ps. 90:3; Isa. 13:12). *The* word can, at times, refer to an individual, but only in the most general sense (Isa. 56:2). The term *’ish*, found 2,160 times in the Old Testament, is a more specialized term referring to a man as a male individual or husband, although at times the writer would use *’ish* to connote “humankind” generally, especially when distinguishing between God and **humankind**.<sup>71</sup> The Old Testament writers employed the term *gever* sixty-six times to depict youth and strength, sometimes using it even of women and children. A related word, *gibbor*, typically refers to mighty men, warriors, or heroes.

Turning to the New Testament, one finds the term *anthrōpos* generally means “humankind,” distinguishing humans from animals (Matt. 12:12), angels (1 Cor. 4:9), Jesus Christ (Gal. 1: 12; although He is *anthrōpos* in Phil. 2:7; 1 Tim. 2:5), and God (John 10:33; Acts 5:29). The word *anthrōpinos* also sets humanity apart from animals in God’s created order (James 3:7), as well as occasionally distinguishing the human from God (Acts 17:24–25; 1 Cor. 4:3–4). At times, Paul uses *anthrōpinos*, connoting the human’s inherent limitations (Rom. 6:19; 1 Cor. 2:13).<sup>72</sup>

Because of the generic use of terms such as *’adam*, *’enosh*, and *anthrōpos*, believers must exercise caution when developing doctrines that distinguish between male and female roles. Often English versions fail to distinguish between the generic terms and gender-specific terms. Even when more specific gender-oriented words are used (such as *’ish* or *gever* in the Old Testament, and *anēr* in the New Testament), the teaching may not be limited to the gender being addressed, because many times the words overlap in meaning. For instance, even the word “brothers” (*adelphoi*), normally a gender-specific term, often implicitly includes “sisters” as well.<sup>73</sup>

The biblical writers frequently describe humanity as sinful creatures in need of redemption. Indeed, we cannot study humanity in the Bible in an abstract sense because statements

<sup>71</sup>The feminine *’ishshah* means “woman” or “wife.”

<sup>72</sup>*Anēr* is the term used for an individual man or husband; *gunē* means “woman” or “wife.”

<sup>73</sup>Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 52, n. 22.

about humankind “are always partly theological pronouncements.” “\* To sum up, the biblical writers fairly typically portray humanity as perverting the knowledge of God in rebellion against the law of God (Gen. 6:3,5; Rom. 1:18–32; 1 John 1:10). Therefore, Jesus extends a **universal** call to repentance (Matt. 9: 13; Mark 1: 15; Luke 15:7; John 3: 15–18), as do other New Testament authors. Truly, “God has placed human beings at the focus of His attention, to redeem them for himself and to dwell with them **forever**.”<sup>75</sup>

#### THE ORIGIN OF HUMANKIND

The biblical writers consistently maintain that God created human beings. Scripture passages that discuss the details more precisely indicate God created the first man directly out of the (moist) dust of the ground. There is no room here for the gradual development of simpler life forms into more complex ones, culminating in human **beings**.<sup>76</sup> In Mark 10:6 Jesus himself states, “At [“from” KJV] the beginning of creation God “made them male and female.” ” There can be no doubt that evolution is at odds with the biblical record. The Bible clearly indicates that the **first** man and woman were created in God’s image, at the beginning of creation (Mark 1 0:6), not **fashioned** over millions of years of macroevolutionary processes.

In an intriguing passage, Genesis records God’s special creation of woman: “Then the **LORD** God made a woman **from** the rib he had taken out of the man” (2:22). The original word “rib” here is *tsela*, a term used of a human anatomical component only here in the Old Testament. Elsewhere, the word means a side of a hill, perhaps a ridge or terrace (2 Sam. 16:13), the sides of the ark of the covenant (Exod. 25:12,14), a side chamber of a building (1 Kings 6:5; Ezek. 41:6), and the leaves of a folding door (1 Kings 6:34). Therefore, the

<sup>74</sup>H. Vorlander, “*anthrōpos*” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, ed., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 565.

<sup>75</sup>1 Tim. 2:3–6; 4:10; Titus 2:1 1; Heb. 2:9; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 22:17. H. Wayne House, “Creation and Redemption: A Study of Kingdom Interplay,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (March 1992): 7.

<sup>76</sup>Gen. 1:26–27; 2:7; 3:19; 5:1; 6:7; Deut. 4:32; Pss. 90:3; 103:14; 104:30; Eccles. 3:20; 12:7; Isa. 45:12; 1 Cor. 11:9; 15:47. See J. Rankin, “The Corporeal Reality of Nephesh and the Status of the Unborn,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31 (June 1988): 154–55.



word could mean that God took part of Adam's side, including bone, flesh, arteries, veins, and nerves, since later the man says the woman is both " 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' " (Gen. 2:23). The woman was made "of the same stuff" as the man (i.e., shared the same essence). Moreover, this passage (and others) makes it clear that the woman was the object of God's direct creative activity, just as the man was.

#### THE BASIC COMPONENTS OF HUMAN BEINGS

What are the basic components that make up the human being? The answer to this question usually includes a study of the terms "mind," "will," "body," "soul," and "spirit." In fact, the biblical writers employ a wide variety of terms to describe the elemental components of human beings.

The Bible speaks of the "heart," "mind," "kidneys," "loins," "liver," "inward parts," and even "bowels" as components of people that contribute to their distinctively human capacity to respond to certain situations. The Hebrew would use the word "heart" (*lev, levav*) to refer to the physical organ, but more often in the abstract sense to connote the inner nature, the inner mind or thoughts, the inner feelings or emotions, deep impulses, and even the will. In the New Testament, "heart" (*kardia*) also could refer to the physical organ, but it primarily means the inner life with its emotions, thoughts, and will, as well as the dwelling place of the Lord and the Holy Spirit.

Old Testament writers also employed the term *kilyab*, "kidneys" ("reins," KJV), to refer to the inner and secret aspects of personality. Jeremiah, for instance, laments to God concerning his insincere countrymen, "You are always on their lips but far from their kidneys" (Jer. 12:2, literal reading). In the New Testament, *nephroi*, "kidneys," is used only once (Rev. 2:23), when Jesus warns the angel of the church in Thyatira, "Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches kidneys and hearts" (literal).

At times the New Testament writers referred to a person's attitude with the word *splanchna*, "inward parts" ("bowels," 1 John 3:17, KJV). Jesus was "moved with compassion" toward the crowd (Mark 6:34, KJV; see also 8:2). The meaning in these passages seems to be "loving mercy." In one place, *splanchna* appears to be parallel to *kardia*, "heart" (2 Cor. 6:12); in another place, it occurs where we might expect the word *pneuma* ("spirit," 2 Cor. 7: 15).

New Testament writers also frequently spoke of the "mind" (*nous, dianoia*) and "will" (*thelēma, boulēma, boulēsis*). The "mind" denotes the faculty of intellectual perception, as well as the ability to arrive at moral judgments. In certain occurrences in Greek thought, the "mind" seems to be parallel to the Old Testament term "heart," *lev*. In other places, the Greeks apparently distinguished between the two (see Mark 12:30). In considering the "will," the "human will or volition can be represented, on the one hand, as a mental act, directed towards a free choice. But, on the other hand, it can be motivated by desire pressing in from the unconscious."<sup>77</sup> Since the biblical writers use these terms in a variety of ways (just as we do in everyday language), it is difficult to determine from the Scriptures exactly where the "mind" ends and the "will" begins.

It should be apparent that many of the terms we have discussed are somewhat ambiguous and certainly overlap at times. Now the discussion turns to the terms "body," "soul," and "spirit." Is it possible to incorporate all of the previously mentioned terms into components such as "soul" and "spirit"? Or is such a division artificial, and the best we can hope for is a **material/immaterial** division?

The biblical writers had a wide variety of terms to choose from when referring to the "body." The Hebrews could speak of the "flesh" (*basar, sh'er*); "soul" (*nephesh*), referring to the body (Lev. 21:11; Num. 5:2, where the meaning appears to be "dead body"); and "strength" (*m'od*), meaning the "strength" of one's body (Deut. 6:5). The New Testament writers spoke of the "flesh" (*sarx*, at times meaning physical body), "strength" (*ischus*) of the body (Mark 12:30), or, most frequently, "body" (*sōma*), occurring 137 times.

When speaking of the soul, the Hebrews' primary term was *nephesh*, occurring 755 times in the Old Testament. Most often this all-encompassing word simply means "life," "self," "person" (Josh. 2:13; 1 Kings 19:3; Jer. 52:28). When used in this broad sense, *nephesh* describes what we are: We are souls, we are persons (in this sense, we do not "possess" souls or **personhood**).<sup>78</sup> At times *nephesh* could refer to a person's "will or desire" (Gen. 23:8; Deut. 2 1: 14). Occasionally, however, it connotes that element in human beings which possesses various appetites or hunger. With this term, the Old

<sup>77</sup>D. Müller, "Will, Purpose," in New *International Dictionary*, vol. 3, 1015.

<sup>78</sup>Rankin, "Corporeal Reality," 156.



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Testament writers referred to physical hunger (Deut. 12:20), the sexual drive (Jer. 2:24), and a moral desire (Isa. 26:8–9). In Isaiah 10: 18 *nephesh* occurs together with “flesh” (*basar*), apparently denoting the whole person.<sup>79</sup>

The New Testament writers used *psuchē* to describe the soul of the human person 101 times. In Greek thought, the “soul” could refer to (1) the seat of life, or life itself (Mark 8:35); (2) the inward part of a human being, equivalent to the ego, person, or personality (the Septuagint translates the Hebrew *lev*, “heart,” with *psuchē* twenty-five times); or (3) the soul in contrast to the body. The term *psuchē*, as a conceptual element of human beings, probably means “insight, will, disposition, sensations, moral powers”<sup>80</sup> (Matt. 22:37). However, it is not easy to draw hard-and-fast lines between the many meanings of this word.

When speaking of the spirit, the Hebrew would use *ruach*, a term found 387 times in the Old Testament. Although the basic meaning of this term is “air in motion,” “wind,” or “breath,” *ruach* also denotes “the entire immaterial consciousness of man” (Prov. 16:32; Isa. 26:9). In Daniel 7:15, the *ruach* is contained in its bodily “sheath.”<sup>81</sup> J. B. Payne points out that both the *nephesh* and the *ruach* can leave the body at death and yet exist in a state separate from it (Gen. 35:18; Ps. 86:13).<sup>82</sup>

Turning to the New Testament, the term *pneuma*, also basically meaning “wind,” “breath,” refers to the “spirit” of a man or woman. It is that power which people experience as relating them “to the spiritual realm, the realm of reality which lies beyond ordinary observation and human control.” The spirit, then, links human beings to the spiritual realm and assists them in interacting with the spiritual realm. In other uses, however, when death occurs, the spirit departs and the

<sup>79</sup>For a full analysis of *nephesh*, see R. I. Ilarris, *Man—God’s Eternal Creation: Old Testament Teaching on Man and His Culture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 9–12; E. Brotzman, “Man and the Meaning of *Nephesh*,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (October to December 1988) 400–409.

<sup>80</sup>Colin Brown, “Soul,” in *New International Dictionary*, vol. 3, 677, 684.

<sup>81</sup>The Aramaic is literally “As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed in its sheath.” The Septuagint, however, divides the words differently and reads “on account of this” instead of “in its sheath.”

<sup>82</sup>J. B. Payne, “*ruach*” in *Theological Wordbook*, vol. 2, 836–37.

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body ceases to be the embodiment of the whole person (Matt. 27:50; Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59).<sup>83</sup>

After this brief survey of biblical terms, questions remain: What are the most basic constituent elements of human beings? Can all of the terms discussed be subsumed under body, soul, and spirit? Should we speak only of the material versus the immaterial? Or should we view human beings as a unity, and indivisible as such?

**Trichotomism.** Trichotomists hold that the constituent elements of the human individual are three: body, soul, and spirit. The physical makeup of human beings is the material part of their constitution that unites them with all living things, including both plants and animals. Plants, animals, and human beings all can be described in terms of their physical existence.

The “soul” is taken to be the principle of physical, or animal, life. Animals possess a basic, rudimentary soul, in that they give evidence of emotions, and are described with the term *psuchē* in Revelation 16:3 (see also Gen. 1:20, where they are described as *nephesh chayyah*, “living souls” in the sense of “living individuals” having a measure of personality). Human beings and animals are distinguished from plants, in part by their ability to express their individual personality.

The “spirit” is taken to be that higher power that establishes human beings in the realm of the spiritual and enables them to fellowship with God. The spirit can be distinguished from the soul, in that the spirit is “the seat of the spiritual qualities of the individual, whereas the personality traits reside in the soul.” Although the spirit and the soul are distinguishable, they are not separable. Pearlman states, “The soul survives death because it is energized by the spirit, yet both soul and spirit are inseparable because spirit is woven into the very texture of soul. They are fused and welded into one substance.”<sup>84</sup>

Passages that appear to support trichotomism include 1 Thessalonians 5:23, where Paul pronounces the benediction, “May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In 1 Corinthians 2:14 through 3:4, Paul speaks of human beings as *sarkikos* (lit-

<sup>83</sup>Colin Brown, “Spirit,” in *New International Dictionary*, vol. 3, 693. Rom. 8:16; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 2 Tim. 4:22; Philem. 25; Heb. 4:12; James 4:5. Brown, “Spirit,” vol. 3, 694.

<sup>84</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 520. Myer Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1981). 102.

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erally, “fleshly,” 3: 1,3), *psuchikos* (literally, “soulsh,” 2: 14), and *pneumatikos* (literally, “spiritual” 2: 15). These two passages ostensibly speak of three elemental components. Several other passages appear to distinguish between the soul and spirit (1 Cor. 15:44; Heb. 4:12).

Trichotomism has been rather popular in conservative Protestant circles. However, H. O. Wiley points out that errors may occur when various components of trichotomism fall out of balance. The Gnostics, an early syncretic religious group that adopted elements of both paganism and Christianity, maintained that since the spirit emanated from God, it was incapable of sin. The Apollinarians, a fourth-century heretical group condemned by several church councils, thought that Christ possessed a body and a soul, but that the human spirit was replaced in Christ by the divine *Logos*. **Placeus** (1596–1655 or 1665), of the School of Samur in France, taught that the *pneuma* alone was directly created by God. The soul, **Placeus** thought, was mere animal life and perished with the body.<sup>85</sup>

**Dichotomism** Dichotomists maintain that the constituent elements of human beings are two: material and immaterial. Proponents of this view point out that in both Testaments the words “soul” and “spirit” are used interchangeably at times. This seems to be the case with the parallel placement of “spirit” and “soul” in Luke 1:46–47, “‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior’ ” (see also Job 27:3). Furthermore, many passages seem to imply a twofold division of human beings, with “soul” and “spirit” used synonymously. In Matthew 6:25 Jesus says, “‘Do not worry about your life (*psuchē*), what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.’ ” In Matthew 10:28 Jesus again states, “‘Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.’ ” However, in 1 Corinthians 5:3, Paul speaks of being “absent in body” (KJV; *sōma*) but “present in spirit” (KJV; *pneuma*), the two aspects apparently encompassing the whole person. Moreover, there are times when losing *one’s pneuma* means death (Matt. 27:50; John 19:30), as surely as losing *one’s psuchē* does (Matt. 2:20; Luke 9:24).

Dichotomism is “probably the most widely held view through most of the history of Christian thought.”<sup>86</sup> **Propo-**

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nents of this view, as with trichotomists, are capable of stating and defending their view without drifting into error. Pearlman states, “[B]oth views are correct when properly understood.”<sup>87</sup> However, when components of dichotomism lose their balance, errors are possible.

The Gnostics adopted a cosmological dualism, which had a significant impact on their view of human beings. The universe was said to be divided by an immaterial, spirit side, which was intrinsically good, and a material, physical side, which was intrinsically evil. An unbridgeable gulf separated these two aspects of the universe. Paradoxically, human beings comprised both components. As a consequence of this innate dualistic nature, human beings could react in one of two ways: (1) sin at will because the good spirit would never be tainted with the evil body or (2) punish the body through ascetic disciplines because it was evil.

Moving to the modern era, Erickson cites errors within liberal theology, such as the following: (1) some liberals believe the body is *not an* essential part of human nature, i.e., the person can function quite well without it, and (2) other liberals go so far as to substitute the resurrection of the soul for the biblical doctrine of the resurrection of the body.<sup>88</sup>

**Monism.** Monism, as a worldview, dates back “to the pre-Socratic philosophers who appealed to a single unifying principle to explain all the diversity of observed experience.”<sup>89</sup> However, monism may take a much narrower focus, and does so when applied to the study of human beings. Theological monists contend that the various components of human beings described in the Bible make up an indivisible, radical unity. In part, monism was a neoorthodox reaction against liberalism, which had proposed a resurrection of the soul, but not the body. But, as we **shall** see, monism, in rightly reacting against liberalism’s error, has its own problems.

Monists point out that where the Old Testament employs the word “flesh” (*basar*), the New Testament writers apparently use both “flesh” (*sarx*) and “body” (*soma*). Any of these biblical terms can refer to the whole person because people in the biblical era viewed a person as a unified being. According to monism then, we must view human beings as unified wholes, not as various components that can be indi-

<sup>85</sup>Wiley, *Christian Theology*, vol. 2, 18. Wiley gives other examples of historic errors due to an unbalanced treatment of elements within trichotomism.

<sup>86</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 52 1.

<sup>87</sup>Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines*, 10 1.

<sup>88</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 523–24.

<sup>89</sup>D. B. Fletcher, “Monism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 730.

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vidually identified in its own category. When the biblical writers speak of "body and soul. ... It should be considered an exhaustive description of human personality. In the Old Testament conception," each individual person "is a psychophysical unity, flesh animated by **soul**."<sup>90</sup>

The **difficulty** with monism, of course, is that it leaves no room for an intermediate state between death and the physical resurrection in the future. This view is at odds with numerous Scripture **passages**.<sup>91</sup> Jesus also clearly spoke of the soul and body as divisible elements when He warned, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28).

Having surveyed several views of the human being, and having observed possible errors within each position, we are ready to formulate a possible synthesis. The biblical writers appear to use terms in a variety of ways. "Soul" and "spirit" seem to be synonymous at times, while at other times they appear to be distinct. In fact, numerous biblical terms appear to describe the whole human person, or self, including "man," "flesh," "body," and "soul," as well as the compound "flesh and blood." The Old Testament, perhaps more obviously than the New, views the individual person as a unified being. Human beings are humans because of all that they are. They are part of the spiritual world and can relate to spiritual reality. They are emotional, willful, moral creatures. Humans are part of the physical world and therefore can be identified as "flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:16, KJV; Eph. 6:12; Heb. 2:14). The physical body, created by God, is not inherently evil, as the **Gnostics** contended (and as some Christians seem to believe).

The Bible's teaching concerning the sinful nature of fallen human beings **affects** all of what a human is, not just one component.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, human beings-as we know them, and as the Bible identifies them-cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). An essential change must take place first. Furthermore, when the immaterial component of a human departs at death, neither separated element can be described as a human being. What remains in the ground is a corpse, and what has departed to be with Christ is a disembodied, immaterial being, or spirit (which is a personal **conscious** existence, but not a "fully human" existence). At the

<sup>90</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology* 526.

<sup>91</sup>Luke 22:43; 2 Cor. 5:6,8; Phil. 1:21-24. See also chap. 18, pp. 606-11.

<sup>92</sup>See chap. 8, pp. 277-78.

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resurrection of the body, the spirit will be reunited with a resurrected, changed, immortal body (1 Thess. 4:13-17), but still will never again be considered human in the same sense as we are now (1 Cor. 15:50).

Viewing the human being as a conditional unity has several implications. First, what affects one element of the human being **affects** the whole person. The Bible sees the person as a whole being, "and whatever touches one part affects the whole." In other words, a person with a chronic illness in the body may expect that the emotions, the mind, and the ability to relate to God as usual may all be affected. Erickson observes, "The Christian who desires to be spiritually healthy will give attention to such matters as diet, rest, and **exercise**."<sup>93</sup> In a similar vein, a person undergoing certain mental stresses may manifest physical symptoms or even physical illnesses.

Second, the biblical view of salvation and sanctification is not to be thought of as bringing the evil body under the control of the good spirit. When the New Testament writers spoke of the "flesh" in a negative sense (Rom. 7:18; 8:4; 2 Cor. 10:2-3; 2 Pet. 2:10), they were referring to the sinful nature, not specifically to the physical body. In the process of sanctification, the Holy Spirit renews the whole person. Indeed, we are a whole "new creation" in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17).

## THE ORIGIN OF THE SOUL

No one in the medical or biological field quarrels over the origin of the human being's physical body. At conception, when the male sperm cell unites with the female ovum, the DNA molecule in each respective cell unravels and unites with the DNA from the other, forming an entirely new cell (a zygote). This new living cell is so different that after it attaches to the uterine wall the mother's body responds by sending antibodies to eliminate the unrecognized intruder. Only special, innate protective features in the new organism safeguard it from **destruction**.<sup>94</sup>

Therefore, it is improper for female proponents of abortion to speak of the embryo or fetus-at any stage-as "my body." The developing organism within the mother's womb is, in

<sup>93</sup>J. S. Wright, "Man," in New *International Dictionary*, 567. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 539.

<sup>94</sup>See Dr. Liley in J. C. Willke, *Abortion: Questions and Answers*, rev. ed. (Cincinnati: Hayes Publishing Co., Inc., 1990), 51-52.

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fact, a discrete, individual body. From conception on, this distinct body will produce more cells, all of which will retain the unique chromosome pattern of the original zygote. It is clear, therefore, that the human body finds its origin in the act of conception.

The origin of the soul is more **difficult** to determine. For the purpose of the following discussion, we will define the soul as the entire immaterial nature of the human being (encompassing the biblical terms: "heart," "kidneys," "bowels," "mind," "soul," "spirit," etc.). The biblically oriented **theories**<sup>95</sup> of the soul's origin are three: preexistence, creationism (God directly creates each soul), and traducianism (each soul is derived from the soul of the parents).

**Preexistence Theory.** According to the preexistence theory, a soul created by God at some time in the past enters the human body at some point in the early development of the fetus. More specifically, the souls of all people had a conscious, personal existence in a previous state. These souls sin to varying degrees in this preexistent state, condemning them to be "born into this world in a state of sin and in connection with a material body." The most important Christian proponent of this view was Origen, the Alexandrian theologian (ca. 185–ca. 254). He maintained that the present state of being we observe now (the soul/body individual) is only one stage in the existence of the human soul. Hodge elaborates on Origen's view of the soul: "It has passed through innumerable other epochs and forms of existence in the past, and is to go through other innumerable such epochs in the future."<sup>96</sup>

Because of its insuperable difficulties, the preexistence theory has never won many supporters. (1) It is based on the pagan notion that the body is inherently evil and therefore the embodiment of the soul is tantamount to punishment. (2) The Bible never speaks of the creation of human beings prior to Adam, or of any apostasy of humanity prior to the Fall in Genesis 3. (3) The Bible never attributes our present sinful condition to any source higher than the sin of our first parent, Adam (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22).

**Creationism Theory.** According to the creationism theory, "Each individual soul is to be regarded as an immediate cre-

<sup>95</sup>We will not survey pagan theories, such as reincarnation, which is contrary to the Bible's linear view of history.

<sup>96</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1877), 66.

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ation of God, owing its origin to a direct creative act."<sup>97</sup> The precise timing of the soul's creation, and its uniting with the body, is simply not addressed by the Scriptures. (For this reason, analyses by both proponents and antagonists are somewhat vague on this point.) Supporters of this view include Ambrose, Jerome, Pelagius, Anselm, Aquinas, and most of the Roman Catholic and Reformed theologians. Biblical evidence used to buttress the creationism theory tends toward those Scripture passages that ascribe the creation of the "soul" or "spirit" to God (Num. 16:22; Eccles. 12:7; Isa. 57:16; Zech. 12:1; Heb. 12:9).

Some who reject the creationism theory point out that the Scriptures also assert that God created the body (Ps. 139: 13–14; Jer. 1:5). "Yet," Augustus Strong remarks, "we do not hesitate to interpret these latter passages as expressive of mediate, not immediate **creatorship**."<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, this theory does not account for the tendency of all people to sin.

**Traducianism.** Strong cites Tertullian, the African theologian (ca. 160–ca. 230), Gregory of Nyssa (330–ca. 395), and Augustine (354–430) as making comments that support **traducianism**,<sup>99</sup> although none of them provides a full explanation of the view. More recently, the Lutheran reformers generally accepted traducianism. The term "traducian" stems from the Latin *traducere*, "to bring or carry over, to transport, transfer." The theory maintains that "the human race was immediately created in Adam, with respect to the soul as well as the body, and that both are propagated from him by natural **generation**."<sup>100</sup> In other words, God provided in Adam and Eve the means by which they (and all humans) would have **offspring** in their own image, comprising the totality of the material-immaterial person.

Genesis 5:1 records, "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God." In contrast, Genesis 5:3 states, "When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in **his own** likeness, in his own image." God empowered Adam and Eve to bear children who were like themselves in composition. Furthermore, when David said he was "sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5), we find evidence that David inherited from his parents, at conception, a soul with

<sup>97</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1941), 199.

<sup>98</sup>Strong, *Systematic*, 49 1–92.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 493–94.

<sup>100</sup>Thiessen, *Lectures*, 165.

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tendencies to sin. Finally, in Acts 17:26 Paul states, "From one man he made every nation," implying that all that constitutes "humanity" came from Adam. For the proponent of traducianism, abortion at any stage in the development of the zygote, embryo, or fetus constitutes the termination of someone who was fully human.

Opponents of traducianism object that in contending for the parental generation of a soul as well as a body in the offspring, the soul has been reduced to a material substance. Traducianists would reply that this conclusion is not necessary. The Bible itself does not specify the precise procreative process that generates the soul. It must, therefore, remain a mystery. Opponents also object that traducianism requires Christ to have partaken of the sinful nature when He was born of Mary. Traducianists would reply that the Holy Spirit sanctified what Jesus received from Mary and protected Him from any taint of human sinful **tendencies**.<sup>101</sup>

## THE UNITY OF HUMANITY

*The* doctrine of the unity of humanity contends that both male and female human beings of all races originated through Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:27–28; 2:7,22; 3:20; 9:19; Acts 17:26). That both male and female humans are in the image of God is clear from Genesis 1:27, "Male and female he created them" (see also Gen. 5:1–2). The point is that **all** human beings of both sexes, in all races, economic classes, and age-groups, equally bear the image of God and therefore are all equally valuable in God's sight.

Since the Bible presents both sexes of the human race as being made in the image of God, there is no room for males' viewing females as somehow inferior, or as second-class members of the human race. The word "helper" (Gen. 2: 18) is often used of God (Exod. 18:4) and does not indicate a lower status.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, when the New Testament places wives in a role of functional subordination to their husbands (Eph. 5:24; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3: 1), it does not necessarily follow that females are inferior to males, or even that females should be functionally subordinate to males generally (the

<sup>101</sup>"Luke 1:35; John 14:30; Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22.

<sup>102</sup>For interaction with Aquinas and others who said male and female were equally image-bearers in a primary sense, but unequal in a secondary sense, see H. Lazenby, "The Image of God: Masculine, Feminine, or Neuter?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (March 1987): 63-64.

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New Testament pattern is that wives are subordinate to their **own**<sup>103</sup> husbands).

The verb "submit" (Gk. *hupotassō*), used in the four submission passages above, is also employed in 1 Corinthians 15:28, where Paul states that the Son will be "subject" to the **Father**.<sup>104</sup> Yet all believers generally understand that an administrative subjection is intended—the Son is in no way inferior to the Father. The same may be said of the wife and husband passages. Although God has ordained different functional roles for various members of a family, the family members in subordinate roles do not have less personal value than their administrative leader. Indeed, the apostle Paul teaches that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). All the blessings, promises, and provisions of the kingdom of God are equally available to all.

Additionally, racism cannot be sustained in the face of the human race's origin in Adam and Eve. Instead, the Bible focuses on other distinctions. For instance, the Old Testament writers mention "seed," "descendant" (*zera'*); "family," "clan," "kindred" (*mishpachah*); "tribe" (*matteh, shavet*) for general divisions by biological lineage; and "tongue" (*lashon*) for divisions by language. Following a similar pattern, the New Testament writers refer to "descendant," "family," "nationality" (genos); "nation" (*ethos*); and "tribe" (*phulē*).

The biblical writers simply were not concerned with race as a distinction between human beings based on hair color and texture, skin and eye color, stature, bodily proportions, and the like. M. K. Mayers concludes, "The Bible does not refer to the term 'race'; nor is there a concept of race developed in the Bible." Therefore, the racial myths that Cain's curse brought the black race into the world, or that Ham's curse was dark skin, must be **rejected**.<sup>105</sup> Instead Genesis 3:20 simply declares, "Adam named his **wife** Eve, because she would become the mother of *all the living*."

<sup>103</sup>The Greek specifies that wives are to submit to their "own" (*idiois*) husbands (1 Pet. 3: 1).

<sup>104</sup>Note that citizens are to submit to the government (Rom. 13: 1); the church to its leader (1 Cor. 16:16); and the younger to the older (1 Pet. 5:5).

<sup>105</sup>M. K. Mayers, "Race," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Merrill C. Tenney, ed. vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 22. Note that all Cain's descendants died in the Flood. Also, Noah's curse was only on Canaan, the ancestor of the Canaanites, not on the African descendants of Ham. Noah's family undoubtedly had inheritance factors that would settle out into the races of people that we have today.

In the New Testament, the gospel of Christ invalidated all distinctions between human beings that were, during the first century, quite significant. They included the divisions that existed between Jews and Samaritans (Luke 10:30–35); between Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10:34–35; Rom. 10: 12); between Jews and the uncircumcised, barbarians, and Scythians (Col. 3:11); between males and females (Gal. 3:28); and between slaves and free people (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). In Acts 17:26 Paul states, “From one man he [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth.” In the next verse Paul indicates God’s purpose in this creative act: “God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him” (17:27). In light of passages such as these, it would be hopeless to try to sustain a racist view based on some supposed support from the Bible.

Finally, there can be no ranking of human worth based on economic station or age. God’s purpose for humankind is for us to know, love, and serve Him. God made us “able to know Him and respond to Him. This is the fundamental distinguishing characteristic ... shared by all **humanity**.”<sup>106</sup> Therefore, any ranking or classification of the intrinsic value of any group of human beings must be rejected as artificial and unscriptural.

#### THE IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMAN BEINGS

The Bible **affirms** that human beings were created in God’s image. Genesis 1:26 records God saying, “‘Let us make man [*‘adam*, ‘humankind’] in our image, in our likeness’ ” (see also 5: 1). Other Scripture passages clearly show that human beings even though descended from fallen Adam and Eve (rather than being objects of God’s immediate creation) are still image-bearers (Gen. 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9).

The Hebrew terms in Genesis 1:26 are *tselem* and *d’muth*. The word *tselem*, used sixteen times in the Old Testament, basically refers to an image or working model. The word *d’muth*, used twenty-six times, refers variously to visual, audible, and structural similarities in a pattern, shape, or form. These terms seem to be explained in the rest of 1:26–28 as humanity having the opportunity to subdue the earth (that is, bring it under control by learning about it and using it properly) and to rule (in a beneficent way) over the rest of earth’s creatures (see also Ps. 8:5–8).

<sup>106</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 54 1.

The New Testament uses the words *eikbn* (1 Cor. 11:7) and *homoiōsis* (James 3:9). The word *eikbn* generally means “image,” “likeness,” “form,” “appearance” throughout its range of uses. The word *homoiōsis* means “likeness,” “resemblance,” “correspondence.” Since both Old and New Testament terms appear to be broad and interchangeable, we must look beyond lexical studies to determine the nature of the image of God.

Before we affirm what the image of God is, we will briefly explain what it is not. The image of God is not a physical likeness, as per the Mormon and Swedenborgian views. The Bible clearly says that God, who is an omnipresent Spirit, cannot be limited to a corporeal body (John 1:18; 4:24; Rom. 1:20; Col. 1: 15; 1 Tim. 1: 17; 6: 16). The Old Testament does use terms such as “the finger” or “the arm of God” to express His power. It also speaks of His “wings” and “feathers” to express His protecting care (Ps. 9 1:4). But these terms are anthropomorphisms, figures of speech used to give a picture of some aspect of God’s nature or **love**.<sup>107</sup> God warned Israel not to make an image to worship, for when God spoke to them at Horeb (Mount Sinai), they “saw no form of any kind” (Deut. 4:15). That is, any physical form would be contrary to what God is really like.

Another error, perhaps a modern version of the serpent’s lie in Genesis 3:5, is that the image of God makes humans “little gods.”<sup>108</sup> Certainly, “[s]ound exegesis and hermeneutics are and always will be the only effective antidote to [these and other] ‘new’ doctrines, most of which are just old **heresies**.”<sup>109</sup>

Having identified positions to avoid, we now direct our attention to the biblical view of the image of God. Several New Testament passages provide us with the foundation for our definition of the image of God in the human person. In Ephesians 4:23–24 Paul reminds the Ephesians that they were taught “to be made new in the attitude of [their] minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” In another place, Paul says the reason we make proper moral choices is because we “have put on

<sup>107</sup>See W. Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 78–84.

<sup>108</sup>This error has found supporters among the so-called Word of Faith speakers.

<sup>109</sup>Gordon Anderson, “Kingdom Now Theology: A Look at Its Roots and Branches,” *Paraclete* 24 (Summer 1990): 8–11.

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the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col. 3:10).

These verses indicate that the image of God pertains to our moral-intellectual-spiritual nature. To elaborate, the image of God in the human person is something we are, not something we have or do. This view is in perfect accord with what we have already established as God’s divine purpose in the creation of humankind. First, God created us to know, love, and serve Him. Second, we relate to other human beings and have the opportunity to exercise proper dominion over God’s creation. The image of God assists us in doing precisely these things.

Turning our attention to the specific nature of the image of God, Wiley distinguishes between the natural, or essential, image of God in the human and the moral, or incidental, image of God in the human.<sup>110</sup> By the natural image of God we mean that which makes humans human and therefore distinguishes them from animals. This includes spirituality, or the ability to sense and have fellowship with God. Moreover, Colossians 3:10 indicates that the image of God includes knowledge, or the intellect. Because of our God-given intellect, we have the unique capacity to communicate intelligently with God and with each other on an order quite unknown in the animal world.<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, human beings alone in God’s creation have the capacity for immortality. Even when God’s fellowship with humankind was broken at the Fall, in Genesis 3, *the* cross of Christ ushered in the means that provided for fellowship with God forever. Finally, according to the context of Genesis 1:26–28, the image of God undoubtedly includes a provisional dominion (with responsibility for proper care) over the creatures of the earth.

Concerning the moral image of God in humans, “God made mankind upright” (Eccles. 7:29). Even pagans who have no knowledge of the written law of God nevertheless have an unwritten moral law imprinted by God upon their hearts (Rom. 2: 14–15). In other words, human beings alone possess the ability to sense right and wrong and have the intellect and will with the capacity to choose between them. For this reason, human beings are often called free moral agents, or are said to possess self-determination. Ephesians 4:22–24 ap-

<sup>110</sup>Wiley, *Christian Theology*, vol. 2, 32–39.

<sup>111</sup>See M. Cosgrove, *The Amazing Body Human: God’s Design for Personhood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 163–64.

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pears to indicate that the moral image of God, though not completely eradicated at the Fall, has been negatively affected to some extent. To have the moral image restored “in true righteousness and holiness,” the sinner must accept Christ and become a new creation.

One final word is in order on the volitional freedom humans enjoy. Fallen humans, even with volitional freedom, are incapable of choosing God.<sup>112</sup> God, therefore, munificently equips people with a measure of grace, enabling and preparing them to respond to the gospel (John 1:9; Titus 2:11). God purposed that He would fellowship with people who of their own free will decided to respond to His universal call to salvation. In keeping with this divine purpose, God endowed human beings with the capacity to accept or reject Him. The human will has been freed **sufficiently** to, as the Scriptures implore, “turn to God,” “repent,” and “believe.”<sup>13</sup> Hence, when we cooperate with the Spirit’s wooing and accept Christ, that cooperation is not the means to renewal, but is instead the result of renewal. For Bible-believing Christians of all persuasions, salvation is 100 percent external (an unmerited gift from a gracious God). God has graciously given us what we need to **fulfill** His purpose for our lives: knowing, loving, and serving Him.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What does the phrase “creation *ex nihilo*” mean, and what biblical evidence is there for the doctrine?
2. Why should Christians be involved in attempts to harmonize the biblical data with the scientific data?
3. What good has resulted from the ongoing debate between proponents of the various creationist models?
4. What are the advantages of a conditional-unity view of the constitution of human beings over trichotomism and dichotomism?
5. What constitutes the image of God in human beings?

<sup>112</sup>*Writings of James Arminius*, vol. 1, 526; see also vol. 2, 472–73.

<sup>13</sup>1 Kings 8:47; 2 Chron. 20:20; Prov. 1:23; Isa. 31:6; 43:10; Ezek. 14:6; 18:32; Joel 2:13–14; Matt. 3:2; 18:3; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3, 5; John 6:29; 14:1; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 16:31; 17:30; Phil. 1:29; 1 John 3:23.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

# ***The Origin, Nature, and Consequences of Sin***

***Bruce R. Marino***

The Bible's teaching about sin<sup>1</sup> presents a profound twin vista: the plunging depravity of humanity and the surpassing glory of God. Sin shades every aspect of human existence, enticing us from the outside as an enemy and compelling us from the inside as a part of our fallen human nature. In this life sin is known intimately, yet it remains alien and mysterious. It promises freedom but enslaves, producing desires that cannot be satisfied. The more we struggle to escape its grasp, the more inextricably it binds us. Understanding sin assists us in the knowledge of God, yet it is that which distorts knowledge of even the self. But if the light of divine illumination can penetrate its darkness, not only that darkness, but also the light itself, can be better appreciated.

The practical importance of the study of sin is seen in its seriousness: Sin is contrary to God. It affects all creation, including humanity. Even the least sin can bring eternal judgment. The remedy for sin is nothing less than Christ's death on the cross. The results of sin embrace all the terror of suffering and death. Finally, the darkness of sin displays the glory of God in a stark and terrible contrast.\*

The importance of the study of the nature of sin may be

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<sup>1</sup>The technical term for the study of sin is "hamartiology," derived from Greek *hamartia*, "sin."

<sup>2</sup>See Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary Press, 1947), 227-28, 252-53.



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understood in its relation to other doctrines. Sin distorts and casts doubt upon all knowledge. In defending the Christian faith, one struggles with the ethical dilemma of how evil can exist in a world governed by an all-good, all-powerful God.

The study of the nature of God must consider God's providential control over a sin-cursed world. The study of the universe must describe a universe that was created good but that now groans for redemption. The study of humankind must deal with a human nature that has become grotesquely inhuman and unnatural. The doctrine of Christ faces the question of how the fully human nature of the virgin-born Son of God can be fully sinless. The study of salvation must state not only *to* what but also *from* what humanity is saved. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit must consider conviction and sanctification in light of a sinful flesh. The doctrine of the Church must shape ministry to a humanity that is distorted by sin outside and inside the Church. The study of the end times must describe, and to some extent defend, God's judgment upon sinners while proclaiming sin's end. Finally, practical theology must seek to evangelize, counsel, educate, govern the Church, affect society, and encourage holiness in spite of sin.

The study of sin, however, is **difficult**. It is revolting, focusing on the gross ugliness of widespread, open sin and the subtle deception of secret, personal sin. Today's post-Christian society reduces sin to feelings or to acts, ignoring or wholly rejecting supernatural evil. Most insidiously, the study of sin is frustrated by the irrational nature of evil itself.

The number of nonscriptural views of sin is legion. Despite their being nonscriptural, studying them is important for the following reasons: to think more clearly and scripturally about Christianity; to defend more accurately the faith and to critique other systems; to evaluate more critically new psychotherapies, political programs, educational approaches, and the like; and to minister more effectively to believers and nonbelievers who may hold these or similar nonscriptural views.<sup>3</sup>

Building on Søren Kierkegaard's existentialism, many theories argue that humans are caught in a dilemma when their limited abilities are inadequate to meet the virtually limitless possibilities and choices of their perceptions and imaginations. This situation produces tension or anxiety. Sin is the

<sup>3</sup>For a summary of many of these views, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 581-95.

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futile attempt to resolve this tension through inappropriate means instead of pessimistically accepting it or, in Christian versions, turning to God."

In a more radical development, some argue that individual existence is a sinful state because people are alienated from the basis of reality (often defined as "god") and from each other. This theme can be found in an early form in the ancient Jewish philosopher Philo. It is currently expressed by liberal theologians such as Paul Tillich and within many forms of Eastern religion and New Age thought.<sup>5</sup>

Some believe sin and evil are not real but merely illusions that may be overcome by right perception. Christian Science, Hinduism, Buddhism, the positive thinking of some popular Christianity, much psychology, and aspects of the New Age movement resonate with this view.<sup>6</sup>

Sin also has been understood as the unevolved remnants of primal animal characteristics, such as aggression. Advocates of this view say the story of Eden is really a myth about the development of moral awareness and conscience, not a fall.<sup>7</sup>

Liberation theology sees sin as the oppression of one societal group by another. Often combining the economic theories of Karl Marx (which speak of the class struggle of the ultimately victorious proletariat against the bourgeoisie) with biblical themes (such as Israel's victory over Egyptian slavery), liberation theologians identify the oppressed in economic, racial, gender, and other terms. Sin is eliminated by removing the social conditions that cause the oppression. Extremists advocate violent overthrow of unredeemable op-

<sup>5</sup>On Christian existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, 2d ed., Walter Lowrie, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); id., *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness unto Death*, Walter Lowrie, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954). For a fully developed theory: Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, vol. 1 *Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1964), 178-86.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), 19-78. J. Isamu Yamamoto, *Beyond Buddhism: A Basic Introduction to the Buddhist Tradition* (Downers Grove, 111.: Intervarsity, 1982). Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). Karen Hoyt, *The New Age Rage* (Old Tappan, NJ.: Fleming H. Revell, 1987).

<sup>7</sup>Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1934), 480.

<sup>8</sup>Frederick R. Tennant, *The Origin and Propagation of Sin* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1902).

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pressors, while moderates emphasize change through social action and **education**.<sup>8</sup>

Among the most **ancient** views of sin is dualism, the belief that there is a struggle between (virtually or actually) preexistent and equal forces, or gods of good and evil. These cosmic forces and their battle cause sinfulness in the temporal sphere. Often, evil matter (especially flesh) either carries or actually is sin that must be conquered. This idea appears in ancient Near Eastern religions such as Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism. In many versions of Hinduism and Buddhism, and their New Age offspring, evil is reduced to an amoral **necessity**.<sup>9</sup>

Some modern theology sees “god” as finite and even morally evolving. Until the dark side of the divine nature is controlled, the world will suffer evil. This is typical of process theology’s blending of physics and Eastern **mysticism**.<sup>10</sup>

Much popular thought, uninformed Christianity, Islam, and many moralistic systems hold that sin consists only in willful actions. Morally free people simply make free choices; there is no such thing as a sin nature, **only** actual events of sin. Salvation is simply being better and doing **good**.<sup>11</sup>

Atheism holds that evil is merely the random chance of a godless cosmos. Sin is rejected, ethics is merely preference, and salvation is humanistic self-advancement.\*

Although many of these theories may appear to contain some insight, none takes the Bible as fully inspired revelation. Scripture teaches that sin is real and personal; it originated in the fall of Satan, who is personal, wicked, and active; and through Adam’s **fall** sin spread to a humanity created good by an all-good God.

\*Alfred T. Hennelly, ed., *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (New York: Orbis, 1990), an anthology of primary sources.

<sup>8</sup>R.C. Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi A Compendium of Zoroastrian Beliefs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

<sup>9</sup>Royce Gordon Gruenler, *The Inexhaustible God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), a general critique of process.

<sup>11</sup>Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980).

\*Paul Kurtz, ed., *Humanist Manifestos I and II* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1973), 15–16.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF SIN

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The Bible refers to an event in the darkest recesses of time, beyond human experience, when sin became **reality**.<sup>13</sup> An extraordinary creature, the serpent, was already confirmed in wickedness before “sin entered the world” through Adam (Rom. 5: 12; see Gen. 3).<sup>14</sup> This ancient serpent is met **elsewhere** as the great dragon, Satan, and the devil (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). He has been sinning and murdering **from** the beginning (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8). Pride ( 1 Tim. 3:6) and a fall of angels (Jude 6; Rev. 12:7–9) also are associated with this cosmic catastrophe. <sup>15</sup>

Scripture also teaches of another Fall: Adam and Eve were created “good” and placed in an idyllic garden in Eden, enjoying close communion with God (Gen. 1:26 through 2:25). Because they were not divine and were capable of sinning, their continuing dependence on God was necessary. Similarly, they required regular partaking of the tree of **life**.<sup>16</sup> This is indicated by God’s invitation to eat of every tree, including the tree of life, before the Fall (2: 16), and His strong prohibition afterward (3:22–23). Had they obeyed, they may have been blissfully fruitful, developing forever ( 1:28–30). Alternatively, after a period of probation, they may have achieved a more permanent state of immortality either by translation into heaven (Gen. 5:21–24; 2 Rings 2:1–12) or by a **resurrection** body on earth (cf. believers, 1 Cor. 15:35–54).

**God** permitted Eden to be invaded by Satan, who craftily tempted Eve (Gen. 3:1–5). Ignoring God’s Word, Eve gave in to her desire for beauty and wisdom, took the forbidden fruit, offered it to her husband, and they ate together (3:6). Eve was deceived by the serpent, but Adam seems to have sinned knowingly (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14; God’s tacit agreement in Gen. 3: 13–19). It may be that while Adam heard the command not to eat of the tree directly from God, Eve heard it only through her husband (Gen. 2:17; cf. 2:22). Hence, Adam was more responsible before God, and Eve was more

<sup>13</sup>It is crucial to the present argument that the narratives of the creation and, by extension, the Fall are factual and historical. *Where We Stand* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1990), 105.

<sup>14</sup>See chap. 6, p. 196.

<sup>15</sup>See chap. 6, p. 210.

<sup>16</sup>Pelagianism denies Adamic immortality. “Contingent” immortality first appears in Theophilus of Antioch ( 115–68–81): “To Autolycus,” 2.24.

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susceptible to Satan (cf. John 20:29). This may explain Scripture's emphasis on Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22) when actually Eve sinned first. Finally, it is crucial to observe that their sin began in free moral choices, not temptations (which they could have resisted: 1 Cor. 10:13; James 4:7). That is, although temptation provided the incentive to sin, the serpent did not pick the fruit or force them to eat it. They chose to do so.

Humanity's **first** sin embraced all other sins: effrontery and disobedience to God, pride, unbelief, wrong desires, leading astray of others, mass killing of posterity, and voluntary submission to the devil. The immediate consequences were numerous, severe, extensive, and ironic (note carefully Gen. 1:26 through 3:24): The divine-human relationship of open communion, love, trust, and security was exchanged for isolation, defensiveness, blame, and banishment. Adam and Eve and their relationship degenerated. Intimacy and innocence were replaced by accusation (as they shifted the blame). Their rebellious desire for independence resulted in pain in childbirth, toil, and death. Their eyes were truly opened, knowing good and evil (through a shortcut), but it was a burdensome knowledge unbalanced by other divine attributes (e.g., love, wisdom, knowledge). Creation, entrusted to and cared for by Adam, was cursed, groaning for deliverance from the results of his faithlessness (Rom. 8:20–22). Satan, who had offered Eve the heights of divinity and promised that the man and woman would not die, was cursed above all creatures and condemned to eternal destruction by her offspring (see Matt. 25:41). Finally, the first man and woman brought death to all their children (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:20–28).

The Jewish **Midrash** takes God's warning that death would come when (literally, "in the day") they ate of the tree (Gen. 2:17) as a reference to Adam's physical death (Gen. 3: 19; 5:5) since a day, in God's sight, is as a thousand years (Ps. 90:4) and Adam lived only 930 years (Gen. 5:5). Others see it as a necessary consequence of being cut off from the tree of life. Many Jewish rabbis noted that Adam was never immortal and that his death would have come immediately if God had not delayed it out of mercy. Most hold that spiritual death or separation from God occurred that day.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Meir Zlotowitz, *Bereishis, Genesis*, vol. 1 (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1977), 102–3. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part 1* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1972), 125. Some, in this connection,

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Yet, even in judgment God graciously made Adam and Eve coverings of skins, apparently to replace their self-made coverings of leaves (Gen. 3:7,21).<sup>18</sup>

## ORIGINAL SIN: A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS

Scripture teaches that Adam's sin **affected** more than just himself (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22). This issue is called original sin. It poses three questions: to what extent, by what means, and on what basis is Adam's sin transmitted to the rest of humanity? Any theory of original sin must answer these three questions and meet the following biblical criteria:

**Solidarity.** All humanity, in some sense, is united or bound to Adam as a single entity (because of him, all people are outside the blessedness of Eden; Rom. 5: 12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22).

**Corruption.** Because human nature was so damaged by the Fall no person is capable of doing spiritual good without God's gracious assistance. This is called total corruption, or depravity, of nature. It does not mean that people can do no apparent good, but only that they can do nothing to merit salvation. Nor is this teaching exclusively Calvinistic. Even Arminius (although not all his followers) described the "Free Will of man towards the True Good" as "imprisoned, destroyed, and lost ... it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine Grace." Arminius' intent, like Wesley's after him, was not to retain human freedom in spite of

say that that meant Adam and Eve "became mortal." But the Bible is very clear that God alone has immortality (1 Tim. 6:16). "You will surely die" occurs twelve other times in the Old Testament and always refers to punishment for sin or untimely death as punishment. Cf. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–11: New International Commentary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 173–74. J. H. Hertz, ed. *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 2d ed. (London: Soncino Press, 1978), 8. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 128. He points out, "The contention that the Old Testament does not know spiritual death, because it does not happen to use that very expression, is a rationalizing and shallow one, which misconstrues the whole tenor of the Old Testament."

<sup>18</sup>Note the possible symbolism of the God-given coverings, which necessitated the spilling of blood, suggesting atonement (cf. Gen. 4:2–5; Heb. 9:22).

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the Fall, but to maintain divine grace as greater than even the destruction of the Fall.<sup>19</sup>

Such corruption is recognized in the Bible: Psalm 51:5 speaks of David's being conceived in sin; that is, his own sin goes back to the time of his conception. Romans 7:7-24 suggests that sin, although dead, was in Paul from the first. Most crucially, Ephesians 2:3 states that all are "by nature objects [literally, 'children'] of wrath." "Nature," *phusis*, speaks of the fundamental reality or source of a thing. Hence, the very "stuff" of all people is corrupt.<sup>20</sup> Since the Bible teaches that all adults are corrupt and that like comes from like (Job 14:4; Matt. 7:17-18; Luke 6:43), humans must produce corrupt children. Corrupt nature producing corrupt offspring is the best explanation of the universality of sinfulness. While several Gospel passages refer to the humility and spiritual openness of children (Matt. 10:42; 11:25-26; 18:1-7; 19:13-15; Mark 9:33-37, 41-42; 10:13-16; Luke 9:46-48; 10:21; 18:15-17), none teach that children are uncorrupted. In fact, some children are even demonized (Matt. 15:22; 17:18; Mark 7:25; 9:17).

**Sinfulness of All.** Romans 5:12 says "all sinned." Romans 5:18 says that through one sin all were condemned, implying all have sinned. Romans 5:19 says that through one man's sin all were made sinners. Passages that speak of universal sinfulness make no exception for infants. Sinless children would be saved without Christ, which is unscriptural (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Liability to punishment also indicates sin.

**Liability to Punishment.** All people, even infants, are subject to punishment. "Children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3, **KJV**) is a Semitism indicating divine punishment (cf. 2 Pet. 2:14).<sup>21</sup> The biblical imprecations against children (Ps. 137:9) indicate this. And Romans 5:12 says physical death (cf. 5:6-8, 10, 14, 17)

<sup>19</sup>Arminians would not define the acceptance of God's offer of salvation as a meritorious act. H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, vol. 2 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1940), 138. Arminius (1560-1609), "Public Disputations" in *The Writings of James Arminius*, vol. 3, trans. W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 375. See also Carl Bangs, *Arminius, A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 343. John Wesley, "Sermon LXII.—On the Fall of Man," *Sermons on Several Occasions*, vol. 2 (New York: Carlton & Porter, n.d.), 34-37.

<sup>20</sup>Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 99.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., also G. Braumann's treatment of *teknon* in "Child" in New *International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Cohn Brown, ed., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 286.

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comes on all, apparently even infants, because all have sinned. Children, prior to moral accountability or consent (the chronological age probably varies with the individual), are not personally guilty. Children are without a knowledge of good or evil (Deut. 1:39; cf. Gen. 2:17). Romans 7:9-11 states Paul was "alive" until the Mosaic law (cf. 7:1) came, causing sin "to spring to life" (cf. NIV), which deceived and killed him spiritually.

**Childhood Salvation.** Although infants are considered sinners and therefore liable to hell, this does not mean any are actually sent there. Various doctrines indicate several mechanisms for saving some or all: unconditional election within Calvinism; paedobaptism within sacramentalism; preconscious faith; God's foreknowledge of how a child would have lived; God's peculiar graciousness to children; the implicit covenant of a believing family (perhaps including the "law of the heart," Rom. 2:14-15), superseding the Adamic covenant; prevenient grace (from Latin: the grace "which comes before" salvation), extending the Atonement to all under the age of accountability. In all events, one may rest assured that the "Judge of all the earth" does right (Gen. 18:25).

**The Adam-Christ Parallel.** Romans 5:12-21 and, to a lesser extent, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 emphasize a strong parallel between Adam and Christ. Romans 5:19 is especially significant: "As through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made [Gk. *kathistēmi*] sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Christ] the many will be made [*kathistēmi*] righteous." In the New Testament, *kathistēmi* typically refers to one appointing another to a position. No actual act is required to attain the position. Hence, people who had not actually sinned could be made sinners by Adam. In a mirror image of Christ, Adam can make people sinners by a forensic, or legal, act not requiring actual sin on their part. (That a person must "accept Christ" to be saved cannot be part of the parallel, since infants who cannot consciously accept Christ may be saved; 2 Sam. 12:23.)

**Not All Like Adam** Some people clearly did not sin in the same manner as Adam, yet they did sin and they did die (Rom. 5:14).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Because Paul stipulates the period between Adam and Moses, he must be primarily thinking about adults disobeying a direct command of God with a death penalty attached, as did Adam in Eden and Israel after the Mosaic law. That is, since Adam's sin brought death, God was just in decreeing that their sins should bring death. This can refer to infants (as some think), but only by extension.

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**One Man's One Sin.** In Romans 5: 12-21, Paul repeatedly says that one man's one sin **brought condemnation** and death (see also 1 Cor. 15:21-22) on all people.

**The Cursed Ground.** Some basis must be identified for God's cursing the ground (Gen. 3: 17-18).

**Christ's Sinlessness.** Christ must be allowed a complete human nature and also safeguard His complete sinlessness.

**God's Justice.** God's justice in allowing Adam's sin to pass to others must be preserved.

## ORIGINAL SIN: A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Many attempts have been made to construct a theological model or theory to fit these complex parameters. Some of the more significant are discussed **here**.<sup>23</sup>

**Jewish Conceptions.** *Three* main motifs are found in Judaism. The dominant theory is that of the two natures, the good, *yetser tov*, and evil, *yetser ra'* (cf. Gen. 6:5; 8:21). The rabbis debated the age at which these impulses manifest themselves and whether the evil impulse is true moral evil or only natural instinct. In all events, wicked people are controlled by the evil impulse while good people control it. A second theory concerns the "watchers" (Gen. 6:1-4), angels who were to oversee humanity but sinned with human females. Finally, there are ideas of original sin that anticipate Christianity. Most dramatically, the **Midrash** (commentary) on Deuteronomy explains the death of the righteous Moses by analogy to a child who inquires of the king as to why he is in prison. The king replies that it is because of the sin of the boy's mother. Similarly, Moses died because of the first man who brought death into the world. In summary, original sin

<sup>23</sup>Space precludes subtleties such as the precise nature of corruption and dozens of other positions, such as the philosophical realism of Odo and the Arbitrary Divine Constitution and Approval of Edwards. More complete, if still biased, summaries include Henri Rondet, *Original Sin, the Patristic and Theological Background*, trans. C. Finegan (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1972); F. R. Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1903); Norman P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Full and Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1927).

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is not a Pauline innovation, but Paul, by the Spirit, developed it in accordance with progressive **revelation**.<sup>24</sup>

**Agnosticism** Some hold that there is insufficient biblical evidence to form a detailed theory of original sin. Any statement beyond a connection between Adam and the human race in the matter of sinfulness is deemed philosophical **speculation**.<sup>25</sup> Although it is true that doctrine ought not to be based on extra-scriptural speculation, deduction from Scripture is valid.

**Pelagianism.** Pelagianism strongly emphasizes personal responsibility in opposition to moral laxness. Pelagius (A.D. ca. 361-ca. 420) taught that God's justice would not permit the transfer of Adam's sin to others, so all people are born sinless and with a totally **free** will. Sin is spread only through bad example. Hence, sinless lives are possible and are found within and outside the Bible. Yet, all this is unscriptural. It also makes the biblical connections of Adam to humanity meaningless. Jesus' death becomes only good example. Salvation is merely good works. New life in Christ is really old discipline. While rightly emphasizing personal responsibility, holiness, and that some sins are learned, Pelagianism has correctly been judged a **heresy**.<sup>26</sup>

**Semipelagianism.** Semipelagianism holds that although humanity is weakened with Adam's nature, sufficient free will remains for people to initiate faith in God, to which He then responds. The weakened nature is transmitted naturally from

<sup>24</sup>E.g., Talmud: Berakoth 61a and Nedarim 32b; Genesis Rabbah 9: 10; Testament of Asher 1:5. A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York: Schocken, 1949), 88-93. Baruch 56:11-16; 1 [Ethiopic] Enoch 1:5; 10:8-15; 12:2-4; 13:10; 14:1-3; 15:9; 39:12-13; 40:2; and Jubilees 4:15, 22; 7:21; 8:3; Testament of Reubin 5:6; Damascus Document (Zadokite Fragment) 2:17-19; Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen) 2: 1. In Talmud: Shabbath 88b, 104a; Pesahim 54a; Behorath 55b; Tamid 32b. In Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: Apocalypse of Moses (The Greek Life of Adam and Eve) 14, 32; 2 Baruch 17:2-3; 23:4; 48:42-43; 54:15-19; 56:5-10; Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach 14:17; 25:24; 2 Enoch 30:14-31:8; 4 Ezra 3:7, 21-22; 4:30-32; 7:16-18; Life of Adam and Eve 44; Wisdom of Solomon 2:23-24, cf. 10:1-4. Rabbah 9:8, cf. Aboth 5:18.

<sup>25</sup>Supporters include Peter Lombard (ca. 1100-1160), Sentences II 30.5; The Councils of Trent (1545-63), and Vatican II (1962); G. W. Bromiley, "Sin" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 519-20.

<sup>26</sup>Pelagius (ca. 360-ca. 420), Celestius (A. 411), Rufinus Tyrannius (ca. 355-ca. 410), Julian of Eclanum (born 380-died between 425 and 455), and many modern theological liberals hold the position.

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**Adam.**<sup>27</sup> Yet, how God's justice is maintained in allowing innocent people to receive even a tainted nature and how Christ's sinlessness is protected are not well explained. Most important, in some formulations, semipelagianism teaches that though human nature is so weakened by the Fall that it is inevitable that people sin, yet they have enough inherent goodness to initiate actual faith.

**Natural or Genetic Transmission.** This theory holds that transmission of the corrupt nature is based on the law of inheritance. It assumes that spiritual traits are transmitted in the same manner as natural ones. Typically such theories speak of the transmission of corruption but not guilt. Yet, there seems to be no adequate basis for God to inflict corrupt natures on good souls. Nor is it clear how Christ can have a fully human nature that is free from sin.<sup>28</sup>

**Mediate Imputation.** Mediate imputation understands God as charging or imputing guilt to Adam's descendants through an indirect, or mediate, means. Adam's sin made him guilty and, as a judgment, God corrupted Adam's nature. Because none of his posterity was part of his act, none are guilty. However, they receive his nature as a natural consequence of their descent from him (not as a judgment). Yet, before committing any actual or personal sin (which their corrupted nature necessitates), God judges them guilty for possessing that corrupted nature.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, this attempt to protect God from unfairly inflicting "alien guilt" from Adam upon humanity results in **afflicting** God with even greater unfairness, as He allows sin-causing corruption to vitiate parties who are devoid of guilt and then judges them guilty because of this corruption.

**Realism** Realism and federalism (see below) are the two most important theories. Realism holds that the "soul stuff" of all people was really and personally in Adam ("seminally present," according to the traducian view of the origin of the soul),<sup>30</sup> actually participating in his sin. Each person is guilty because, in reality, each sinned. Everyone's nature is then

<sup>27</sup>Key supporters include Johannes Cassianus (ca. 360–ca. 435), Hilary of Arles (ca. 401–ca. 450), Vincent of Lerins (flourished ca. 450), some later Arminians, and the New School Presbyterians (nineteenth century).

<sup>28</sup>E.g., John Milicy, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989), 505–9.

<sup>29</sup>Key supporters are Placaeus (1596/1655 or 1665) and the School of Saumur.

<sup>30</sup>See chap. 7, pp. 247–48.

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corrupted by God as a judgment on that sin. There is no transmission, or conveyance, of sin, but complete racial participation in the first sin. Augustine (354–430) elaborated on the theory by saying corruption passed through the sexual act. This allowed him to keep Christ free of original sin through the Virgin Birth.<sup>31</sup> W. G. T. Shedd (1820–94) added a more sophisticated underpinning. He argued that beneath the will of everyday choices is the deep will, the "will proper," which shapes the ultimate direction of the person. It is this deep will of each person that actually sinned in Adam.<sup>32</sup>

Realism has great strengths. It does not have the problem of alien guilt, the solidarity of Adam and the race in Adam's sin is taken seriously, "and the 'all sinned' of Romans 5:12 appears well handled.

However, there are problems: Realism has all the weaknesses of extreme traducianism. The kind of personal presence necessary in Adam and Eve strains even Hebrews 7:9–10 (cf. Gen. 46:26), the classic traducianistic passage. The "One might even say" (Heb. 7:9) in Greek suggests that what follows is to be taken **figuratively**.<sup>33</sup> Concepts like a "deep will" tend to require and presuppose a deterministic, Calvinistic view of salvation. Realism, by itself cannot explain why, or on what basis, God curses the ground.

Therefore, something like the covenant is required. For His humanity to be sinless, Jesus must have committed the first sin in Adam and was subsequently purified, or He was not present at all, or He was present but did not sin and was conveyed sinless through all succeeding generations. Each of these presents difficulties. (An alternative is suggested below.) That all personally sinned seems inconsistent with one man's one sin making all sinners (Rom. 5:12, 15–19). Since all sinned in, with, and as Adam, all appear to have sinned in Adam's pattern, contrary to 5:14.

**Federalism** The federal theory of transmission holds that corruption and guilt come upon all humanity because Adam

<sup>31</sup>E.g., *On Mawriage and Concupiscence* vol. 1, 27, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Peter Holmes and R. E. Wallis (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, reprinted 1971), vol. 5, 274–75.

<sup>32</sup>William G. T. Shedd, *Theological Essays*, reprint (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1981), 209–64. Realism began with Tertullian (fl. 200) and has been held by many theologians since.

<sup>33</sup>See Ronald Williamson, *Pbilo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 103–9. Heb. 7:9–10 may support a generic traducianism.

**was** the head of the race in a representative, governmental, or federal sense when he sinned. Everyone is subject to the covenant between Adam and God (the Adamic covenant, or covenant of works, in contrast to the covenant of grace). Analogy is made to a nation that declares war. Its citizens suffer whether or not they agree with or participate in the decision. Adam's descendants are not personally guilty until they actually commit sin, but they are in a guilty state and liable to hell by the imputation of Adam's sin to them under the covenant. Because of this state, God punishes them with corruption. Many federalists therefore distinguish between inherited sin (corruption) and imputed sin (guilt) from Adam. Most federalists are creationists concerning the origin of the soul, but federalism is not incompatible with **traducianism**.<sup>34</sup> Adam's covenant included his stewardship over creation and is the just basis of God's curse on the ground. Christ, as the head of a new covenant and race, is exempt from the judgment of corruption and so is sinless.

Federalism has many strengths. The covenant, as a biblical basis for the transmission of sin, is in reasonable agreement with Romans 5: 12-21 and provides mechanisms for cursing the ground and protecting Christ from sin. However, federalism also has weaknesses. Romans 7 must describe only Paul's realization of his sinful nature, not the actual experience of sin killing him. More important, the transmission of "alien guilt" from Adam is often seen as **unjust**.<sup>35</sup>

**An Integrated Theory.** Several of the above theories may be combined in an integrated approach. This theory distinguishes between the individual person and the sin nature of flesh. When Adam sinned he separated himself from God, which produced corruption (including death) in him as an individual and in his nature. Because he contained all generic nature, it was all corrupted. This generic nature is transmitted naturally to the individual aspect of the person, the "I" (as

<sup>34</sup>See chap. 7, pp. 247-48.

<sup>35</sup>Little-appreciated foreshadowings of federalism are first found in Irenaeus (ca. 130-ca. 200; *Against Heresies*: Adam and Christ: III.22.3-4; Adam and the race: 11.19.6, 21.2, 21.33, 23.8, 33.7; IV.22.1; V.16.2; 17.1, 26.2; Adam's effect on the race: III.22.10, 23.8, IV.22.1; guilt: V.34.2). Many of the Reformed held this view (Dodge, *in extremis*), as did Arminius ("Public Disputations" XXXI.9; but cf. VII.16's realist emphasis), but not all of his followers. Wesley's key materials are cautiously federalist (*Notes on the New Testament*, Rom. 5:12-21; *Doctrine of Original Sin*, sec. VI-VII), as are many of his followers (Wiley). Wesleyans tend toward traducianism.

in Rom. 7).<sup>36</sup> The Adamic covenant is the just basis of this transmission and also of the curse on the ground. The "I" is not corrupted or made guilty by the generic nature, but the generic nature does prevent the "I" from pleasing God (John 14:21; 1 John 5:3). Upon reaching personal accountability, the "I," struggling with the nature, either responds to God's prevenient grace in salvation or actually sins by ignoring it, and so the "I" **itself is** separated from God and becomes guilty and corrupt. God continues to reach out to the "I" through prevenient grace, and it may respond to salvation.

Therefore, Romans 5: 12 can say "all sinned" and all can be corrupt and in need of salvation, but guilt is not inflicted upon those who have not yet actually sinned. This is consistent with the struggle of Romans 7. Not all people sin like Adam (Rom. 5:14), but one man's one sin does bring death and make all sinners; it does so by the Adamic covenant, a mechanism parallel to Christ's making sinners righteous (Rom. 5:12-21). Extreme semipelagianism is avoided since the "I" can only acknowledge its need but cannot act in faith because of the generic human nature (James 2:26). Since separation from God is the cause of corruption, Christ's union with His part of the generic nature restores it to holiness. Because the Spirit came to Mary in the conception of the human "I" of Christ it was preresponsible and therefore sinless. This arrangement is just, because Christ is the Head of a new covenant. Similarly, the Spirit's union with the believer in salvation is regenerating.<sup>37</sup>

Although Scripture does not explicitly **affirm** the covenant as the basis for transmission, there is much evidence in favor of it. Covenants are a fundamental part of God's plan (Gen. 6:18; 9:9-17; 15:18; 17:2-21; Exod. 34:27-28; Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:6,13; 12:24). There was a covenant between God and Adam. **Hosea 6:7**, "Like Adam, they have broken the covenant," most likely refers to this covenant since the alternative translation of "men" (NIV margin) is tautological. Hebrews 8:7, which calls the covenant with Israel "first," does not preclude the Adamic covenant because the context indicates that it refers only to the first covenant of God with Israel (not all humanity)

This theory is compatible with either dichotomy or trichotomy and with either creationism or a moderate traducianism in which personhood emerges in human conception.

<sup>37</sup>It is of no small moment that Adam and Eve passed the sentence of separation from God upon themselves by fearing and hiding prior to God's passing the sentence upon them.



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and there is an explicit, earlier covenant with Noah (Gen. 6: 18; 9:9–17). Biblical covenants are binding over future generations for good (Noah, Gen. 6:18; 9:9–17) or ill (Joshua and the Gibeonites, Josh. 9: 15). Covenants are often the only observable basis for judgment (the Israelites who died at Ai because of Achan's sin at Jericho [Josh. 7]; the suffering of the people due to David's numbering them [2 Sam. 24]). Covenantal circumcision could bring even alien children into Israel (Gen. 17:9–14).

Some object that any theory that transmits any consequence of Adam's sin to others is inherently unfair because it imputes his sin gratuitously, that is, without basis. (Only Pelagianism fully avoids this by making everyone personally responsible. Realism's preconscious sin retains most of the difficulties.) Covenants are, however, a just basis for such transmission for the following reasons: Adam's descendants would have been as blessed by his good behavior as they were cursed by his evil work. The covenant is certainly more fair than mere genetic transmission. The guilt and consequences transmitted by the covenant are similar to sins of ignorance (Gen. 20).

Some object that Deuteronomy 24:16 and Ezekiel 18:20 prohibit transgenerational judgment. But other passages speak of such judgment (the firstborn of Egypt; Moab; Exod. 20:5; 34:6–7; Jer. 32:18). It is just possible, however, to see the former passages as referring to biological **headship** as an insufficient ground for transmitting judgment and the latter passages as referring to a covenantal basis, which is adequate for passing on judgment. Alternatively, in the integrated theory, since the corrupt nature is not a positive judgment of God, the issue of punishment for the father's sin does not really occur. Finally, who, even without corruption and in the perfect Garden, would do better than Adam at obeying God's commandments? And surely what some call the "unfairness" of imputed sin is more than overcome by the graciousness of freely offered salvation in Christ!

Although speculative, an integrated theory utilizing the covenant appears to account for much of the scriptural data.

## THE EXISTENCE AND DEFINITION OF SIN

How can evil exist if God is all good and all powerful?\*" This question, and the related one concerning the source of

\*This is the key question of theodicy.

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evil, is the specter that haunts all attempts to understand sin. Before proceeding further, several kinds of evil must be distinguished. Moral evil, or sin, is lawlessness committed by volitional creatures. Natural evil is the disorder and decay of the universe (natural disasters, some sickness, etc.). It is **connected** to God's curse on the ground (Gen. 3:17–18). **Meta**-physical evil is unintentional evil resulting from creaturely finitude (mental and physical inability, etc.).

The Bible **affirms** God's moral perfection (Ps. 100:5; Mark 10:18) and power (Jer. 32:17; Matt. 19:26). He alone created (Gen. 1: 1–2; John 1: 1–3), and all He created was good (Gen. 1; Eccles. 7:29). He did not create evil, which He hates (Ps. 7:11; Rom. 1:18). He neither tempts nor is tempted (James 1:13). Yet, two apparently contradictory passages must be considered: First, in Isaiah 45:7, the KJV says God creates evil. But *ra'*, "evil," also has a nonmoral sense (e.g., Gen. 47:9, **KJV**), as in the **NIV's** "disaster." This best contrasts with "peace" (cf. Amos 6:3) and is the preferred translation. Hence, God brings moral judgment, not immoral evil.

Second, God's hardening or blinding of people also raises questions. This can be a passive "giving over" in which God simply leaves people to their own devices (Ps. 81 :12; Rom. 1:18–28; 1 Tim. 4:1–2) or an active imposition of hardening in people who have irrevocably committed themselves to evil (Exod. 1:8 through 15:21; Deut. 2:30; Josh. 11:20; Isa. 6:9–10; 2 Cor. 3:14–15; Eph. 4:17–19; 2 Thess. 2:9–12).

Note the example of Pharaoh (Exod. 1:8 through 15:21). Pharaoh was not created for the purpose of being hardened, as a superficial reading of Romans 9:17 ("I raised you up") might suggest. The Hebrew *'amad* and its counterpart in the Septuagint (LXX); *diatēreō* (Exod. 9:16), refer to status or position, not creation, which is within the semantic range of *exegeirō* (Rom. 9: 17). Pharaoh deserved God's judgment when he **first** rejected Moses' plea (Exod. 5:2). But God preserved Pharaoh so He might be glorified through him. Initially, God only predicted His hardening of Pharaoh's heart (4:2 1, Heb. *'achazzeq*, "I will make strong"; 7:3, Heb. *'aqsheb*, "I will make heavy," i.e., hard to move). Before God acted, however, Pharaoh hardened his own heart (implicitly, 1:8–22; 5:2; and explicitly, 7: 13–14). Pharaoh's heart "became hard" (literally, "became strong"), apparently in response to the gracious miracle that removed the plague, and God said Pharaoh's heart was "unyielding" (Heb. *kavedh*, "is heavy"<sup>39</sup> 7:22–23;

<sup>39</sup>The Hebrew does not indicate any action by God in this.



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8:15,32;9:7). Pharaoh then continued the process (9:34–35) with God's assistance (9:12;10:1,20,27;11:10;14:4,8,17).

This pattern is explicit in or compatible with the other cases and with God's holy justice (Rom. 1:18). Therefore, God can accelerate self-confirmed sinfulness for His purposes (Ps. 105:25), but sinners remain responsible (Rom. 1:20).<sup>40</sup>

Since God did not create evil yet did create all that exists, evil cannot have a unique existence. Evil is an absence or disordering of the good. This may be illustrated by common table salt, a compound, or tightly bound mixture, of two chemicals, sodium and chloride. When not bound together, both elements are highly lethal. Sodium bursts into flame upon contact with water, and chlorine is a deadly **poison**.<sup>41</sup> Like disordered salt, God's perfect creation is deadly when thrown out of balance by sin.<sup>42</sup> Through the falls of Satan and Adam all evil arises. Therefore, natural evil stems from moral evil. All sickness is ultimately from sin, but not necessarily the sin of the one who is sick (John 9:1–3), *although* it may be (Ps. 107:17; Isa. 3:17; Acts 12:23). The great irony of Genesis 1 through 3 is that both God and Satan use language: one creatively to bring reality and order *ex nihilo*, the other imitatively to bring deception and disorder. Evil is dependent on the good and Satan's work is only imitation.

Because God was capable of stopping evil (by isolating the tree, for instance) and yet did not, and because He certainly knew what would happen, it seems He allowed evil to occur. (This is far different from causing it.) It follows that the Holy God saw a greater good in allowing evil. Some of the suggestions of the exact nature of this good follow: (1) that humanity would mature through suffering (cf. Heb. 5:7–9);<sup>43</sup> (2) that people would be able to freely and truly love God since such love requires the possibility of hate and sin;<sup>44</sup> (3) that God could express himself in ways that would otherwise be impossible (such as His hatred of evil, Rom. 9:22,

<sup>40</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981) 325–26.

<sup>41</sup>Household bleach is only about 2 percent chlorine.

<sup>42</sup>Augustine thought this disordering resulted when a creature sought other than the highest good (*City of God*, 12.6–8); cf. Rom. 1:25.

<sup>43</sup>Held by Irenaeus and many of the Eastern fathers.

<sup>44</sup>Held by Augustine and many of the Western fathers.

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and gracious love of sinners, Eph. 2:7).<sup>45</sup> All these understandings have some **validity**.<sup>46</sup>

Describing sin is a **difficult** task. This may result from its parasitic nature, in that it has no separate existence but is conditioned by that which it attaches to. Yet, an image of sin's chameleonic, derivative existence does appear in Scripture.

There have been many suggestions of the essence of sin: unbelief, pride, selfishness, rebellion, moral corruption, a struggle of flesh and spirit, idolatry, and combinations of the preceding.<sup>47</sup> While all these ideas are informative, none characterizes every sin, for example, sins of ignorance, and none adequately explains sin as a nature. Most significantly, all these ideas define sin in terms of sinners, who are many, varied, and imperfect. It seems preferable to define sin with reference to God. He alone is one, consistent, and absolute, and against His holiness the contrariness of sin is displayed.

Perhaps the best definition of sin is found in 1 John 3:4—“Sin is lawlessness.” Whatever else sin is, at its heart, it is a breach of God's law. And since “all wrongdoing is sin” (1 John 5:17), all wrongdoing breaks God's law. So David confesses, “Against you, you only, have I sinned” (Ps. 51:4; cf. Luke 15:18,21). Furthermore, transgression forces separation from the God of Life and Holiness, which necessarily results in the corruption (including death) of finite, dependent human nature. Therefore, this definition of sin is biblical, precise, and embraces every type of sin; it accounts for sin's effects on nature and is referenced to God, not humanity. That is, we see its true nature by observing its contrast to God, not by comparing its effects among human beings.

Although believers are not under the Mosaic law, objective standards still exist and can be broken (John 4:21; 1 John 5:3; **the** many regulations in the Epistles). Because of the human inability to fulfill law, only a relationship with Christ can provide atonement to cover sin and power to live a godly life. The believer who sins must still confess and, where pos-

<sup>45</sup>See Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary Press, 1974), 229–34.

<sup>46</sup>Good introductions include Norman Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 311–403, and the liberal John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

<sup>47</sup>For a good summary see Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 577–80; on idolatry, see Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, 1.

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sible, make restitution, not for absolution, but to **reaffirm** his or her relationship with Christ. It is this faith that has always been contrary to “works righteousness” (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38), so that whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23; cf. Titus 1:15; Heb. 11:6). Therefore, sin-in believers or unbelievers, before or after the Crucifixion-is always lawlessness, and the only solution is faith in Christ.

Sin is not defined by feelings or **philosophy**,<sup>48</sup> but only by God in His law, desire, and will. This is discovered most concretely through Scripture. Although optimally the believer’s heart (broadly defined) can sense sin (Rom. 2:13–15; 1 John 3:21), its spiritual sensitivity to good and evil requires development (Heb. 5:14). The heart has been deeply wicked (Jer. 17:9) and can be seared (1 Tim. 4:2); it can also feel false guilt (1 John 3:20).<sup>49</sup> For this reason, subjective feelings must never be placed above God’s objective, written Word. Yet, one must be spiritually sensitive.

The idea of sin as breaking law is imbedded in the very language of Scripture. The **chatta’tb** word group, the most important in Hebrew for “sin,” carries the basic idea of “missing the mark” (Judg. 20:16; Prov. 19:2). With this idea of an objective mark or standard, it can refer to willful sins (Exod. 10:17; Deut. 9:18; Ps. 25:7), an external reality of sin (Gen. 4:7), a pattern of sin (Gen. 18:20; 1 Rings 8:36), errors (Lev. 4:2), and the offerings required for them (Lev. 4:8). **Awon**, “iniquity,” from the idea of “crooked” or “twisted,” speaks of serious sins, often being paralleled with **chatta’tb** (Isa. 43:24). The verb **avar** speaks of the crossing of a boundary, and so, metaphorically of transgression (Num. 14:41; Deut. 17:2). **Resha’ can** mean wrong (Prov. 11:10) or injustice (Prov. 28:3–4).

In Greek, the **hamartia** word group carries the generic concept of sin in the New Testament. With the basic meaning of “missing the mark” (as in **chatta’tb**), it is a broad term originally without moral connotation. In the New Testament, however, it refers to specific sins (Mark 1:5; Acts 2:38; Gal. 1:4; Heb. 10:12) and to sin as a force (Rom. 6:6,12; Heb.

<sup>48</sup>On moral philosophy see, for instance, Emmanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals and Critique Of Practical Reason*. Ironically, “conscience,” such a relativized term in today’s society, derives from the Latin, *conscientia*, “with knowledge,” or “shared knowledge.”

<sup>49</sup>“Seared” may mean “branded.” **Habitual** criminals were branded. Therefore a seared conscience is one that acts like a criminal’s conscience and excuses sin.

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12:1). **Anomiu** (Gk. *nomos*, “law,” plus the negating *a*), “without law,” “lawlessness,” “iniquity,” and its related terms represent perhaps the strongest language of sin. The adjective and adverb may refer to those without the Torah (Rom. 2:12; 1 Cor. 9:21), but the word usually identifies anyone who has broken any divine law (Matt. 7:23; 1 John 3:4). It is also the “lawlessness” of 2 Thessalonians 2:7–12.

Another term for sin, **adikia**, is most literally translated “unrighteousness” and ranges from a mere mistake to gross violations of law. It is great wickedness (Rom. 1:29; 2 Pet. 2:13–15) and is contrasted with righteousness (Rom. 6:13). **Parabasis**, “overstepping,” “transgression,” and its derivatives indicate breaking a standard. The word describes the Fall (Rom. 5:14; cf. 1 Tim. 2:14), the transgression of law as sin (James 2:9,11), and Judas’ loss of his apostleship (Acts 1:25). **Asebeia**, “ungodliness” (the negating *a* added to *sebomui* [“to show reverence,” “to worship,” etc.]), suggests a spiritual insensitivity that results in gross sin (Jude 4), producing great condemnation (1 Pet. 4:18; 2 Pet. 2:5; 3:7).

The idea of sin as lawbreaking or disorder stands in stark contrast to the personal God who spoke into existence an ordered and good world. The very idea of **personness** (whether human or divine) demands order; its absence gives rise to the common and technical term “personality **disorder**.”<sup>50</sup>

## CHARACTERISTICS OF SIN

Many of the facets of sin are reflected in the following characteristics drawn from the biblical record.

Sin as unbelief or lack of faith is seen in the Fall, in humanity’s rejection of general revelation (Rom. 1:18 through 2:2), and in those condemned to the second death (Rev. 21:8). It is closely connected with Israel’s disobedience in the desert (Heb. 3:18–19). The Greek **apistia**, “unbelief” (Acts 28:24), combines the negating *a* with **pistis**, “faith,” “trust,” “faithfulness.” Whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6). Unbelief is the opposite of saving faith (Acts 13:39; Rom. 10:9), ending in eternal judgment (John 3:16; Heb. 4:6,11).

Pride is self-exaltation. Ironically, it is both the desire to be like God (as in Satan’s temptation of Eve) and the rejection

<sup>50</sup>*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3d ed. rev. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1987), 335–58, lists some eleven types of personality disorders.

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of God (Ps. 10:4). Despite its terrible price, it is worthless before God (Isa. 2:11) and is hated by Him (Amos 6:8). It deceives (Obad. 3) and leads to destruction (Prov. 16:18; Obad. 4; **Zech. 10:11**). It helped make the unbelief of Capernaum worse than the depravity of Sodom (Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:15) and stands as the antithesis of Jesus' humility (Matt. 11:29; 20:28; cf. Phil. 2:3–8). In the final judgment, the proud will be humbled and the humble exalted (Matt. 23: 1–12; Luke 14:7–14). Although having a positive side, the Hebrew *ga'on* (Amos 6:8) and the Greek *huperēphanos* (James 4:6) typically denote a deep and abiding arrogance.

Closely related to pride, unhealthy or misdirected desire and its self-centeredness are sin and a motivator to sin (1 John 2: 15–17). *Epithumia*, “desire” (James 4:2), used in a bad sense, leads to murder and war, and *pleonexia*, an impassioned “greed” or “desire to have more,” is equated with idolatry. Consequently, all wicked desire is condemned (Rom. 6:12).

Whether Adam's disobedience or the believer's lovelessness (John 14:15, 21; 15:10), all conscious sin is rebellion against God. The Hebrew *pesba'* involves deliberate, premeditated “rebellion” (Isa. 59:13; Jer. 5:6). Rebellion is also reflected in *marab* (“be refractory, obstinate”; Deut. 9:7) and *sarar* (“be stubborn”; Ps. 78:8), and in the Greek *apeitheia* (“disobedience”; Eph. 2:2), *apostasia* (“apostasy” or “rebellious abandonment, defection”; 2 Thess. 2:3), and *parakoē* (“refusal to hear,” “disobedience”; Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 10:6). And so, rebellion is equated with the sin of divination, which seeks guidance from sources other than God and His Word (1 Sam. 15:23).

Sin, the product of the “father of lies” (John 8:44), is the antithesis of God's truth (Ps. 31:5; John 14:6; 1 John 5:20). From the first, it has deceived in what it promised and incited those deceived to further prevarication (John 3:20; 2 Tim. 3: 13). It can give dramatic, but only temporary, pleasure (Heb. 11:25). The Hebrew *ma'al*, “unfaithfulness,” “deceit” (Lev. 26:40), and the Greek *paraptōma*, “false step,” “transgression” (Heb. 6:6), can both signify betrayal due to unbelief.

The objective side of the lie of sin is the real distortion of the good. “Iniquity,” *awon*, from the idea of twisted or perverted, conveys this (Gen. 19: 15, KJV; Ps. 3 1: 10, KJV; **Zech. 3:9, KJV**). Several compounds of *strephō*, “turn” (*apo-*, Luke 23: 14; *dia-*, Acts 20:30; *meta-*, Gal. 1:7; *ek-*, Titus 3:11), do the same in Greek, as does *skolios*, “crooked,” “unscrupulous” (Acts 2:40).

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In general, the biblical concept of evil encompasses both sin and its result. The Hebrew *ra'* has a wide range of uses: animals inadequate for sacrifice (Lev. 27: 10), life's difficulties (Gen. 47:9), the evil aspect of the tree of Eden (Gen. 2:17), the imaginations of the heart (Gen. 6:5), evil acts (Exod. 23:2), wicked people (Gen. 38:7), retribution (Gen. 31:29), and God's righteous judgment (**Jer. 6:19**). In Greek, *kakos* typically designates bad or unpleasant things (Acts 28:5). However, *kakos* and its compounds can have a wider, moral meaning, designating thoughts (Mark 7:2 1), actions (2 Cor. 5:10), persons (Titus 1:12), and evil as force (Rom. 7:21; 12:2 1). *Ponēria* and its word group develop strongly ethical connotations in the New Testament, including Satan as the “evil one” (Matt. 13: 19; see also Mark 4: 15; Luke 8:12; cf. 1 John 2:13) and corporate evil (Gal. 1:4).

Sins that are especially repugnant to God are designated as detestable (“abominations,” **KJV**). *To'evah*, “something abominable, detestable, offensive,” can refer to the unjust (Prov. 29:27), transvestism (Deut. 22:5), homosexuality (Lev. 18:22), idolatry (Deut. 7:25–26), child sacrifice (Deut. 12:31), and other grievous sins (Prov. 6: 16–19). The corresponding Greek word *bdelugma* speaks of great hypocrisy (Luke 16:15), the ultimate desecration of the Holy Place (Matt. 24: 15; Mark 13:14), and the contents of the cup held by the prostitute Babylon (Rev. 17:4).

## THE FORCE AND EXTENT OF SIN

As indicated throughout this chapter and in the study of Satan (chap. 6), a real, personal, and evil force is operating in the universe against God and His people. This suggests the crucial importance of exorcism, spiritual warfare, and the like, but without the ungodly hysteria that so often accompanies these efforts.

Sin is not only isolated actions, but also a reality or nature within the person (see Eph. 2:3). Sin as nature indicates the “seat,” or “location,” of sin within the person as the immediate source of sin. Negatively, it is seen in the requirement for regeneration, the giving of a new nature to replace the old sinful one (John 3:3–7; Acts 3:19; 1 Pet. 1:23). This is emphasized by the idea that regeneration is something that can happen only from outside the person (**Jer. 24:7**; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26–27; 37:1–14; 1 Pet. 1:3).

The New Testament relates the sin nature to the *sarx*, or “flesh.” While originally referring to the material body, Paul

innovatively equates it with the **sinful** nature (Rom. 7:5 through 8:13; Gal. 5:13,19). In this sense, **sarx** is the seat of wrong desire (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16,24; Eph. 2:3; 1 Pet. 4:2; 2 Pet. 2:10; 1 John 2:16). Sin and passions arise from the flesh (Rom. 7:5; Gal. 5: 17-21), nothing good dwells in it (Rom. 7:18), and gross sinners within the Church are handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, possibly sickness that will cause them to repent (1 Cor. 5:5; cf. 1 Tim. 1:20). **Sōma**, “body,” is only occasionally used in a similar way (Rom. 6:6; 7:24; 8:13; Col. 2:11). The physical body is not looked on as evil in itself.<sup>51</sup>

The Hebrew **lev** or **levau**, “heart,” “mind,” or “understanding,” indicates the essence of the person. It can be sinful (Gen. 6:5; Deut. 15:9; Isa. 29: 13) above all things (Jer. 17:9). Hence, it needs renewal (Ps. 51:10; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:19). Evil intention flows from it (Jer. 3: 17; 7:24), and all its inclinations are evil (Gen. 6:5). The Greek **kardia**, “heart,” also indicates the inner life and self. Evil as well as good comes from it (Matt. 12:33-35; 15:18; Luke 6:43-45). It may signify the essential person (Matt. 15:19; Acts 15:9; Heb. 3:12). The **kardia** can be hard (Mark 3:5; 6:52; 8: 17; John 12:40; Rom. 1:21; Heb. 3:8). Like the **sarx**, the **kardia** can be the source of wrong desires (Rom. 1:24). Similarly, the mind, **nous**, can be evil in its workings (Rom. 1:28; Eph. 4:17; Col. 2:18; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:15), requiring renewal (Rom. 12:2).

Sin struggles against the Spirit. The sin nature is utterly contrary to the Spirit and beyond the control of the person (Gal. 5:17; cf. Rom. 7:7-25). It is death to the human (Rom. 8:6,13) and an offense to God (Rom. 8:7-8; 1 Cor. 15:50). From it comes the **epithumia**, the entire range of unholy desires (Rom 1:24; 7:8; Titus 2:12; 1 John 2:16). Sin even dwells within the person (Rom. 7: 17-24; 8:5-8) as a principle or law (Rom. 7:21,23,25).

Actual sins begin in the sinful nature often as the result of worldly or supernatural temptation (James 1:14-15; 1 John 2:16). One of sin’s most insidious characteristics is that it gives rise to more sin. Sin, like the malignancy it is, grows of itself to fatal proportions in both extent and intensity unless dealt with by the cleansing of Christ’s blood. Sin’s self-reproduction may be seen in the Fall (Gen. 3: 1-13), in Cain’s descent from jealousy to homicide (Gen. 4:1-15), and in David’s lust giving birth to adultery, murder, and generations

<sup>51</sup>See chap. 7, p. 244.

of suffering (2 Sam. 11 through 12). Romans 1: 18-32 recounts humanity’s downward course from the rejection of revelation to complete abandon and proselytization. Similarly, the “seven deadly sins” (an ancient catalog of vices contrasted with parallel virtues) have been viewed not only as root sins, but also as a descending sequence of sin.<sup>52</sup>

This process of sin’s feeding on sin is realized through many mechanisms. The ambitious author of wickedness, Satan, is the archantagonist of this evil drama. As the ruler of this present age (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2), he constantly seeks to deceive, tempt, sift, and devour (Luke 22:31-34; 2 Cor. 11:14; 1 Thess. 3:5; 1 Pet. 5:8), even inciting the heart directly (1 Chron. 21:1). The natural inclination of the flesh, still awaiting full redemption, also plays a part. The temptations of the world beckon the heart (James 1:2-4; 1 John 2:16). Sin often requires more sin to reach its elusive goal, as in Cain’s attempt to hide his crime from God (Gen. 4:9). The pleasure of sin (Heb. 11:25-26) may be self-reinforcing. Sinners provoke their victims to respond in sin (note the contrary exhortations: Prov. 20:22; Matt. 5:38-48; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9). Sinners entice others into sin (Gen. 3:1-6; Exod. 32:1; 1 Kings 21:25; Prov. 1:10-14; Matt. 4:1-11; 5:19; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13; 2Tim. 3:6-9; 2 Pet. 2:18-19; 3:17; 1 John 2:26).<sup>53</sup> Sinners encourage other sinners in sin (Ps. 64:5; Rom. 1:19-32).<sup>54</sup> Individuals harden their hearts against God and try to avoid the mental distress of sin (1 Sam. 6:6; Ps. 95:8; Prov. 28:14; Rom. 1:24,26,28; 2:5; Heb. 3:7-19; 4:7). Finally, the hardening of the heart by God can facilitate this process.

Temptation must never be confused with sin. Jesus suffered the greatest of temptations (Matt. 4: 1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13; Heb. 2:18; 4:15) and was without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26-28; 1 Pet. 1: 19; 2:22; 1 John 3:5; and the proofs of deity). Furthermore, if temptation were sin, God would not provide help to endure it ( 1 Cor. 10: 13). Although

<sup>52</sup>The classic formulation is pride, **greed**, lust, envy, **gluttony**, anger, and sloth. Relevant literature includes John Cassian, *Conference* 5; Gregory the Great, *Moralia on Job* 31.45; and especially Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2.2.

<sup>53</sup>Many rabbis considered murder less grave than enticing another to sin, because the former only removes one from this world while the latter keeps one from heaven (Sifr Deut. sec. 252; 120a; Sanhedrin 55a, 99b). Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 102.

<sup>54</sup>Note the Hebrew **resha’**, “wickedness” or “troubling” (Job 3: 17; Isa. 57:20-21), in relation to the general idea of sinners stirring up trouble.

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God does test and prove His people (Gen. 22:1–14; John 6:6) and obviously allows temptation (Gen. 3), He himself does not tempt (James 1:13). Practically, the Bible admonishes about the danger of temptation and the need to avoid and be delivered from temptation (Matt. 6:13; Luke 11:4; 22:46; 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Tim. 6:6–12; Heb. 3:8; 2 Pet. 2:9).

The Bible is abundantly supplied with descriptions of sinful acts and warnings against them, including catalogs of vices (typically: Rom. 1:29–31; 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:10–11; 6:9–10; 2 Cor. 12:20–21; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph 4:31; 5:3–5; Col. 3:5,8; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). Such accountings show the seriousness of sin and display its incredible variety; however, they also carry the danger of inciting morbid despair over past or future sins. Even more seriously, they can reduce sin to mere actions, ignoring the profundity of sin as law, nature, and a force within the person and the universe, leading the person ultimately to see only the symptoms while ignoring the disease.

Scripture describes many categories relating to sin. Sins may be committed by unbelievers or believers, both of whom are injured by it and require grace. Sins may be committed against God, others, self, or some combination. Ultimately, however, all sin is against God (Ps. 51:4; cf. Luke 15:18, 21). Sin may be confessed and forgiven; if unforgiven, sin will still exercise its sway over the person. The Bible teaches that an attitude can be as sinful as an act. For example, anger is as sinful as murder, and a lustful look is as sinful as adultery (Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28; James 3:14–16). An attitude of sin defeats prayer (Ps. 66:18). Sin can be either active or passive, that is, doing evil and neglecting good (Luke 10:30–37; James 4:17). Bodily sexual sins are very grievous for Christians because they misuse the body of the Lord in the person of the believer and because the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:12–20).

Sins can be done in ignorance (Gen. 20; Lev. 5:17–19; Num. 35:22–24; Luke 12:47–48; 23:34).<sup>55</sup> The Psalmist wisely asks help in discerning them (Ps. 19:12). It seems those who have only the law of nature (Rom. 2:13–15) commit sins of ig-

<sup>55</sup>The KJV's "ignorance" and the NIV's "unintentionally" (e.g., Lev. 4:1 through 5:13) are imprecise. They are better rendered "to err" (*shagag* and *shagab*), as the NIV does elsewhere. Clearly, some of these sins were committed knowingly, but out of human weakness rather than rebellion (e.g., 5:1). The contrast seems to be with "defiant" sins or, literally, sins done with a "high hand" (Num. 15:22–31). R. Laird Harris, "Leviticus" in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebeline, ed., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 547–48.

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norance (Acts 17:30). All people are to some degree responsible and without excuse (Rom. 1:20), and willful ignorance, like that of Pharaoh, from continuing self-hardening is vigorously condemned. Secret sin is as wicked as sin done in public (Eph. 5:11–13). This is especially true of hypocrisy, a form of secret sin in which outward appearance belies inward reality (Matt. 23:1–33; note v. 5). Sins done openly, however, tend to presumption and subversion of the community (Titus 1:9–11; 2 Pet. 2:1–2). Many rabbis believed that secret sin also effectively denied God's omnipresence.<sup>56</sup>

A person commits sins of infirmity because of a divided desire, usually after a struggle against temptation (Matt. 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:31–34, 54–62; perhaps Rom. 7:14–25). Presumptuous sins are done with deeply wicked intent or with "a high hand" (Num. 15:30). Sins of weakness are of less affront to God than presumptuous sins, as indicated by the severity with which Scripture regards presumptuous sins (Exod. 21:12–14; Ps. 19:13; Isa. 5:18–25; 2 Pet. 2:10) and the absence of atonement for them in the Mosaic law (although not in the gospel). However, this distinction of weakness and presumption must never be used unbiblically as an excuse for taking any sin lightly.

Roman Catholic theology distinguishes between venial (Latin *venia*, "favor," "pardon," "kindness") and mortal sins. In venial sins (as in sins of weakness) the will, though assenting or agreeing to the act of sin, refuses to alter its fundamental godly identity. Venial sins can lead to mortal sins. Mortal sins, however, involve a radical reorienting of the person to a state of rebellion against God and a forfeiture of salvation, though forgiveness remains possible. The real distinction between these sins, however, seems to be not in the nature of sin but in the nature of salvation. Catholicism believes that sins are not inherently venial, but that believers have a righteousness which largely mitigates the effect of lesser sins, making them venial. As such they are not a direct detriment to the believer's relationship with God and technically do not require confession.<sup>57</sup> This is not scriptural (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9).

Beyond all other sins, Jesus himself taught that there is a sin without pardon (Matt. 12:22–37; Mark 3:20–30; Luke 12:1–

<sup>56</sup>Higagah 16a.

<sup>57</sup>See G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin*, trans. Philip C. Holtrop (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), 302–14. Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956.

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12; cf. 11: 14–26). There has been much debate over the nature of this “unforgivable sin” or “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” The texts suggest several criteria that any analysis must take into account.

The sin must have reference to the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10). Yet, blasphemy against God or other members of the Trinity (Matt. 12:31–32; Mark 3:28; Luke 12:10; Acts 26:11; Col. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1: 13,20) is forgivable. It cannot be a sin that the Bible lists as forgiven. Such sins include those committed prior to a knowledge of God-demon possession (Luke 8:2–3), crucifying the Lord (23:34), nearly lifelong ungodliness (23:39–43), blaspheming (1 Tim. 1:13), compelling believers to blaspheme (Acts 26:11) and sins committed after a knowledge of God. In addition, the unpardonable sin does not include denying the God of miracles (Exod. 32), returning to idolatry in spite of great miracles (Exod. 32), murder (2 Sam. 11 through 12), gross immorality (1 Cor. 5:1–5), denial of Jesus (Matt. 26:69–75), seeing Jesus’ miracles yet thinking Him “out of his mind” (Mark 3:2 1, just before His teaching on blasphemy), and turning to law after knowing grace (Gal. 2:11–2 1).

The sin must be blasphemy (Gk. *blasphēmia*), the vilest slander against God. In the LXX, *blasphēmia* often describes the denying of God’s power and glory, which is consistent with the Jewish leaders’ ascribing Jesus’ miracles to the devil.<sup>58</sup> The sin must be comparable to the Jewish leaders’ charge that Jesus had an evil spirit (Mark 3:30). The sin cannot be merely denying the witness of miracles, because Peter denied Christ (Matt. 26:69–75) and Thomas doubted Him (John 20:24–29) after seeing many miracles, and they were forgiven.

Since Jesus explicitly says all other sins may be forgiven (Matt. 12:3 1; Mark 3:28), the sin against the Holy Spirit must be compared with Hebrews 6:4–8; 10:26–3 1; 2 Peter 2:20–22; and 1 John 5: 16–17, which also describe unforgivable sin. Notably, Hebrews 10:29 connects unforgivable sin with insulting the Spirit.<sup>59</sup> It also appears that irrevocable hardening

<sup>58</sup>Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, “*Blasphemia*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 62 1–25. For a fascinating parallel see the Dead Sea Scrolls, “The Damascus Document,” section 5, which focuses on the lack of discernment among the people.

That these epistolary passages speak of unforgivable sin that causes forfeiture of salvation is in harmony with the position of the Assemblies of God, *Where We Stand*, 108.

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of the heart and presumption could be included (e.g., 2 Thess. 2:1 1–1 2). As a corollary, neither the incarnate Jesus nor the apostles need to be present for this sin to be committed, since they were seen neither by anyone in the Old Testament nor (most likely) by those addressed in Hebrews, 2 Peter, and 1 John. Hence, the unpardonable sin cannot be a failure to respond to miraculous manifestations of the incarnate Jesus or of the apostles.<sup>60</sup> Nor can it be a temporary denial of the faith,<sup>61</sup> since Scripture considers this forgivable.

The unpardonable sin is best defined as the final, willful rejection of the Holy Spirit’s special work (John 16:7–1 1) of direct testimony to the heart concerning Jesus as Lord and Savior, resulting in absolute refusal to believe. Therefore, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not a momentary indiscretion but an ultimate disposition of will, although Jesus’ statements do suggest that it may be manifested in a specific act.<sup>63</sup> This is consistent with John’s assessment that believers cannot commit continuing sin (1 John 3:6,9). True heartfelt concern indicates the unpardonable sin has not occurred. Such concern, however, is not measured in emotions or even suicidal depression (Matt. 27:3–5; perhaps Heb. 12: 16–1 7), but rather in a renewed seeking after God in faith and dependence upon Him. The passages in Hebrews exemplify this firm, yet sensitive, pastoral balance.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup>The opposite position is often attributed to Jerome (Letter 42) and Chrysostom (“Homilies on Matthew,” 49; Matt. 12:25–26, sec. 5). Yet it seems, especially for Chrysostom, that a rejection refers to the Spirit’s inner witness in any period. The latter may be seen in John A. Broadus, *Cornmentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), 271–73.

<sup>61</sup>So held the rigorist Bishop Novation (fl. mid-third century) concerning the “*lapsi*” (Lat. “those who have fallen or failed”; applied to Christians who worshiped false gods to escape the persecution of Decius, A.D. 249–51 ). Jerome’s *Epistle 42* contains both description and rebuttal.

“This view, in essence, was held by Augustine, by many Lutherans, and by most Arminian theologians. For a good analysis see Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1976). 96102.

<sup>63</sup>Often blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has been distinguished from final impenitence or consistent disregard for the witness of the Spirit that leads to salvation. However, especially in an Arminian soteriology, continued rejection (complete obduracy) of the Holy Spirit’s offer of salvation results in a hardness of heart that prevents any possibility of repentance, reducing the distinction to one of appearance only.

<sup>64</sup>In passing, Jesus’ statement concerning the impossibility of forgiveness “in the age to come” (Matt. 12:32) does not imply post-death forgiveness

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**The Bible** admits degrees of sin. This is demonstrated in several of the categories of sin (above) and differing divine judgments (Matt. 11:24; Mark 12:38–40; Luke 10:12; 12:47–48; John 19:11). Yet, Scripture also teaches that to sin at all makes one fully a sinner (Deut. 27:26 through 28:1; Gal. 3:10; James 2:10).<sup>65</sup> The apparent discrepancy is resolved by the fact that both the most insignificant sin and the most heinous sin are sufficient to bring eternal condemnation. However, more serious sin usually does have more significant implications not only for those sinned against, but also for the sinner as he or she moves farther from God's presence.

The Bible teaches that only God and **unfallen** spiritual beings (such as angels) are unstained by sin. The idea that ancient people lived a simple, quiet life is belied by modern anthropology, which reveals the dark side in all human **societies**.<sup>66</sup> Even liberal theology's evolutionary explanations of sin admit sin's universality.

Sin contaminates the spirit world. Satan's fall (Job 1:6 through 2:6), Satan's fall from heaven (Luke 10:18 and Rev. 12:8–9; however interpreted), "war" in heaven (Dan. 10:13; Rev. 12:7), and references to evil or unclean spirits (2 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 6:10–18; James 4:7) all attest to this. Sin has infected the universe to an extent well beyond the scope of physical science.

Scripture also teaches that every individual is sinful, in some sense. Since Eden, sin has also occurred within groups. Sin is clearly encouraged through group functioning. Contemporary society is a breeding ground for bias based on ability (in the case of the fetus), gender, race, ethnic background, religion, sexual **preference**,<sup>67</sup> and even political stands.

As in Israel, sin is found in the Church. Jesus anticipated

of purgatory (cf. Mark 10:30). It is probably a peremptory denial of the rabbinic hope that blasphemy can be forgiven in death. See John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, vol. 2 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 206–7. His argument is strengthened by Talmud, Yoma 86b's use of Isa. 22:14.

"Although Deut. 27:26 does not contain the word "all," there are several good reasons for accepting it as implied: (1) It is required by the context of Deut. 28:1. (2) It is translated so in the LXX. (3) Paul includes it in his citation in Gal. 3:10. (4) Although the Mosaic law is in view, clearly Paul sees this and the "law of nature" (Rom. 2:13–15) as closely connected.

<sup>66</sup>E.g., Melvin Konner, *The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1982).

<sup>67</sup>This is not to condone homosexual behavior but to condemn anti-homosexual violence.

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it (Matt. 18:15–20) and the Epistles testify to its presence (1 Cor. 1:11; 5:1–2; Gal. 1:6; 3:1; Jude 4–19). A Church without spot or wrinkle will not be a reality until Jesus returns (Eph. 5:27; Rev. 21:27).

Scripture teaches that the effects of sin are found even in nonhuman creation. The curse of Genesis 3:17–18 marks the beginning of this evil and Romans 8:19–22 proclaims nature's disordered state. The creation groans awaiting the **consummation**.<sup>68</sup> The Greek *mutaiotēs*, "frustration," "emptiness" (Rom. 8:20), describes the uselessness of a thing when divorced from its original intent, epitomizing the futility of the present state of the universe itself. The divine thought here may range **from** plants and animals to quarks and galaxies.

The extent of sin is circumscribed chronologically. Prior to creation, and for an unspecified period after, sin did not exist and all was good. Yet not only Christian memory, but also Christian hope knows a future when sin and death will no longer exist (Matt. 25:41; 1 Cor. 15:25–26, 51–56; Rev. 20:10, 14–15).

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

Sin, by its nature, is destructive. Hence, much of its effect already has been described. Yet a brief summation is required.

Discussion of the results of sin must consider guilt and punishment. There are several types of guilt (Heb. *'asham*, Gen. 26: 10; Gk. *enochos*, James 2:10). Individual or personal guilt may be distinguished from the communal guilt of societies. Objective guilt refers to actual transgression whether realized by the guilty party or not. Subjective guilt refers to the sensation of guilt in a person. Subjective guilt may be sincere, leading to repentance (Ps. 51; Acts 2:40–47; cf. John 16:7–11). It may also be insincere, appearing outwardly sincere, but either ignoring the reality of the sin (responding instead to being caught, shamed, penalized, etc.) or evidencing only a temporary, external change without a real, lasting, internal reorientation (e.g., Pharaoh). Subjective guilt also

<sup>68</sup>This passage does not refer to persons. (1) Believers are mentioned separately (Rom. 8:18, 21–25). (2) Sinners would not eagerly expect "the sons of God" (8:19, 21). (3) It would imply universal salvation. (4) Paul uses *ktisis* to mean "creation" elsewhere (cf. Rom. 1:20). (5) It is consistent with God's curse on the ground (Gen. 3:17). (6) It is consistent with the eschatology (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1–2). For a defense, see William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 266–69.



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may be purely psychological in origin, causing real distress but not based on any actual sin (1 John 3:19–20).

Penalty or punishment is the just result of sin inflicted by an authority on sinners predicated on their guilt. Natural punishment refers to the natural evil (indirectly from God) incurred by sinful acts (such as the venereal disease brought on by **sexual** sin and the physical and mental deterioration brought on by substance abuse). Positive punishment refers to the direct supernatural infliction of God: The sinner is struck dead, etc.

The possible purposes for punishment follow: (1) Retribution or vengeance belongs to God alone (Ps. 94:1; Rom. 12:19). (2) Expiation brings restoration of the guilty party. (This was accomplished for us in Christ's **atonement**.<sup>69</sup>) (3) Judgment makes the guilty party become willing to replace what was taken or destroyed, which can be a witness of God's work in a **life** (Exod. 22: 1; Luke 19:8). (4) Remediation **influences** the guilty party not to sin in the future. This is an expression of God's love (Ps. 94:12; Heb. 12:5–17). (5) Deterrence uses the punishment of the guilty party to dissuade others from behaving similarly, which may often be seen in divine warnings (Ps. 95:8–11; 1 Cor. 10:11).<sup>70</sup>

The results of sin are many and complex. They may be considered in terms of who and what they **affect**.

Sin affects God. While His justice and omnipotence are not compromised, Scripture testifies of His hatred for sin (Ps. 11:5; Rom. 1: 18), patience toward sinners (Exod. 34:6; 2 Pet. 3:9), seeking of lost humanity (Isa. 1:18; 1 John 4:9–10, 19), brokenheartedness over sin (Hos. 11:8), lament over the lost (Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34), and sacrifice for humanity's **salvation** (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:14; Rev. 13:8). Of **all** the biblical insights concerning sin, these may be the most humbling.

All the interactions of a once pure human society are perverted by sin. Scripture repeatedly decries the injustice done to the "innocent" by sinners (Prov. 4:16; social, James 2:9; economic, James 5:1–4; physical, Ps. 11:5; etc.).

The natural world also suffers from the effects of sin. The natural decay of sin contributes to health and environmental problems.

<sup>69</sup>Some see this in Isa. 10:20–21 and 1 Cor. 5:5, but such an interpretation seems contrary to the Atonement. On Isa. 10:20–21, see Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 6 10.

<sup>70</sup>"Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1941) 255–61, is useful on penalty and punishment.

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The most varied effects of sin may be noted in God's most complex creation, the human person. Ironically, sin has apparent benefits. Sin can even produce a transient happiness (Ps. 10:1–11; Heb. 11:25–26). Sin **also** spawns delusional thinking in which evil appears good; consequently, people lie and distort the truth (Gen. 4:9; Isa. 5:20; Matt. 7:3–5), denying personal sin (Isa. 29:13; Luke 11:39–52) and even God (Rom. 1:20; Titus 1: 16). Ultimately, the deception of apparent good is revealed as evil. Guilt, insecurity, turmoil, fear of judgment, and the like accompany wickedness (Ps. 38:3–4; Isa. 57:20–21; Rom. 2:8–9; 8: 15; Heb. 2: 15; 10:27).

Sin is futility. The Hebrew '*awen*' ("harm," "trouble," "deceit," "nothingness") summons the image of sin's fruitlessness. It is the trouble reaped by one who sows wickedness (Prov. 22:8) and is the current uselessness of Bethel's (derogatorily, *Beth 'Awen*, "house of nothing") once great heritage (Hos. 4:15; 5:8; 10:5, 8; Amos 5:5; cf. Gen. 28:10–22). *Hevel* ("nothingness," "emptiness") is the recurrent "vanity" (KJV), or "meaningless," of Ecclesiastes and the cold comfort of idols (*Zech. 10:2*). Its counterpart, the Greek *mataiotēs*, depicts the emptiness or futility of sin-cursed creation (Rom. 8:20) and the puffed-up words of **false** teachers (2 Pet. 2: 18). In Ephesians 4:17, unbelievers are caught "in the futility of their thinking" because of their darkened understanding and separation from God due to their hardened hearts.

Sin envelops the sinner in a demanding dependency (John 8:34; Rom. 6:12–23; 2 Pet. 2:12–19), becoming a wicked law within (Rom. 7:23, 25; 8:2). From Adam to Antichrist, sin is characterized by rebellion. This can take the form of testing God (1 Cor. 10:9) or of hostility toward God (Rom. 8:7; James 4:4). Sin brings separation from God (Gen. 2: 17, cf. 3:22–24; Ps. 78:58–60; Matt. 7:21–23; 25:31–46; Eph. 2:12–19; 4:18). This may result in not **only** God's wrath, but **also** His silence (Ps. 66:18; Prov. 1:28; Mic. 3:4–7; John 9:31).

Death (Heb. *maweth*, Gk. *thanatos*) originated in sin and is sin's **final** result (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12–21; 6:16, 23; 1 Cor. 15:21–22, 56; James 1:15). Physical and spiritual death may be distinguished (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4).<sup>71</sup> Physical death is a penalty of sin (Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Ezek. 18:4, 20; Rom. 5:12–17; 1 Cor. 15:21–22) and can come as a specific judgment (Gen. 6:7, 11–13; 1 Chron. 10:13–14; Acts 12:23). However, for believers (who are dead to sin, Rom. 6:2; Col. 3:3; in

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 258–59. He seems extreme in stating, "The Bible does not know the distinction."



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Christ, Rom. 6:3–4; 2 Tim. 2:11) it becomes a restoration by Christ's blood (Job 19:25–27; 1 Cor. 15:21–22) because God has triumphed over death (Isa 25:8; 1 Cor. 15:26,55–57; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14–15; Rev. 20:14).

The unsaved live in spiritual death (John 6:50–53; Rom. 7:11; Eph. 2:1–6; 5:14; Col. 2:13; 1 Tim. 5:6; James 5:20; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 John 5:12). This spiritual death is the ultimate expression of the soul's alienation from God. Sinning believers even experience a partial separation from God (Ps. 66:18), but God is always ready to forgive (Ps. 32:1–6; James 5:16; 1 John 1:8–9).

Spiritual death and physical death are combined and become most fully realized after the final judgment (Rev. 20: 12–14).<sup>72</sup> Although ordained by God (Gen. 2:17; Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4), the fate of the sinful is not pleasurable to Him (Ezek. 18:23; 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

The only way to deal with sin is to love God first, then become a channel of His love to others through divine grace. Only love can oppose that which is opposed to all (Rom. 13: 10; 1 John 4:7–8). Only love can cover sin (Prov. 10: 12; 1 Pet. 4:8) and ultimately remedy sin ( 1 John 4:10). And only "God is love" ( 1 John 4:8). In relation to sin, love may express itself in specific ways.

Knowledge of sin should engender holiness in the life of the individual and an emphasis on holiness in the church's preaching and teaching.

The Church must **reaffirm** her identity as a community of God-saved sinners ministering in confession, forgiveness, and healing. Humility should characterize every Christian relationship as believers realize not only the terrible life and fate from which they are saved, but also the more terrible price of that salvation. When each person is saved from the same sinful nature, no amount of giftedness, ministry, or authority can support the elevation of one above another; rather, each must place the other above himself or herself (Phil. 2:3).

The universal breadth and supernatural depth of sin should cause the Church to respond, with an every-member commitment and a miraculous Holy Spirit power, to the imperative of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).

Understanding the nature of sin ought to renew sensitivity to environmental issues, reclaiming the original mandate of

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caring for God's world from those who would worship the creation rather than its Creator.

Issues of social justice and human need should be **championed** by the Church as a testimony of the truth of love against the lie of sin. However, such testimony must always point to the God of justice and love who sent His Son to die for us. Only salvation, not legislation, not a social gospel that ignores the Cross, and certainly not violent or military action, can cure the problem and its symptoms.

Finally, life is to be lived in the certain hope of a future beyond sin and death (Rev. 21 through 22). Then, cleansed and regenerate, believers will see the face of Him who remembers their sin no more (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 10: 17).

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Why is the study of sin important and what difficulties does it encounter?

2. Identify, describe, and critique the major nonscriptural views of sin and evil.

3. What was the nature and significance of the fall of Adam?

4. What are the biblical issues relevant to the study of original sin?

5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the major theories of original sin?

6. How can evil exist since God is both good and powerful?

7. What is the essence of sin? Give scriptural support.

8. What are the major characteristics of sin? Identify and discuss them.

9. What are some major categories of sin? Briefly discuss them.

10. Discuss the problem of the unpardonable sin. Suggest pastoral concerns and how you would deal with them.

11. Discuss the extent of sin. Give scriptural support.

12. Describe the results of sin. Give special attention to the issue of death.

<sup>72</sup>See chap. 18, pp. 634–35.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

# ***The Lord Jesus Christ***

***David R. Nichols***

The, Lord Jesus Christ is the central figure of all Christian reality; therefore, the truths about Him are central to Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Any theology that deemphasizes Christ by placing humankind in the center cannot ultimately disclose to us the fullness of what the Bible teaches.\* **Jesus is the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies, and He is the author of the teaching of the New Testament.** He is understood by Christians to be the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, as well as the coming King (Rev. 13:8 and 19:11–16).

### **KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS**

We must begin by recognizing that knowledge about Jesus Christ is at once the same as and different from knowledge about other subjects. As the spiritual leader of Christianity, Jesus is **both** the object of knowledge and of faith. He also produces spiritual knowledge through the Holy Spirit in us. **Christians** universally believe that Jesus is alive now, hundreds of years after His life and death on earth, and that He is in the presence of God the Father in heaven. But this persuasion is certainly a product of what is called saving faith, whereby

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The scriptural study of Christ is normally called Christology, from the Greek *Christos* ("Messiah," "Christ," "Anointed One") and *logos* ("word," "discourse").

<sup>1</sup>The Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths reinforces this emphasis by its careful delineation of the relationship between the Father and the Son in Statement 2, "The One True God." The centrality of Christ is further indicated by Statement 3, "The Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ." See William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, Mo.: Logion Press, 1993), 42–72.

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a person encounters Jesus Christ and, through repentance and faith, is regenerated, becoming a new creation. Knowledge of Jesus as Savior then leads, through experience, to a spiritual apprehension of Jesus' personal existence in the present. In this way, knowledge of Jesus is **different** from knowledge of other historical figures.

The New Testament writers were committed Christians and wrote from this perspective. This fact was not missed by nineteenth-century liberal theologians, who asserted that the New Testament books could not teach history about Jesus because they were not objective in the modern **sense**.<sup>3</sup> However, much recent work in hermeneutics has shown that no one writes anything from a neutral or totally objective standpoint.\* What better perspective could there be than that of Christians writing about Someone they had known in the flesh, who also continued in a resurrected state after His life on earth? This leads, of course, to the issue of historical knowledge of Jesus.

If our inquiry is to be valid, it must also address the historical side of Jesus' existence. In the nineteenth century, a search for the historical Jesus was mounted in an **attempt**—under severe antsupernaturalistic, higher critical presuppositions—to distill facts liberal scholars felt they could accept and thereby compile a picture of Jesus that could be relevant and understandable to modern persons. These endeavors drove a wedge between the Jesus of history, who supposedly could be known only by means of **rationalistic**,<sup>5</sup> historical criticism of the Gospels, and the Christ of faith. The latter was viewed as being much larger than the historical Jesus because faith in Him caused the Gospel writers to base their

<sup>3</sup>Carl E. Braaten "Revelation, History, and Faith in Martin Kähler," in *The So-Called Historical Jesus* by Martin Kähler, translated and edited by Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 23. See also Werner G. Kümmel, *The New Testament The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. by S. M. Gilmour and H. C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 203.

<sup>4</sup>Anthony Thistleton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980) 3-47, 283-92.

<sup>5</sup>By "rationalistic criticism" they meant methods that reject the supernatural and have their authority in the scholar's own human reason. Some referred to this as "scientific."

presentation of Jesus on what was preached (the **kerygma**<sup>6</sup>), rather than on the so called historical facts.'

Widely accepted among liberal scholars, this view set the stage for the form-criticism approach, led by Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann. These critics believed that by working backward through the "forms" the Church used to describe Jesus in the **kerygma**,<sup>8</sup> they could at least attempt to discover the historical Jesus. They said the Synoptic Gospels could not be trusted to present the historical Jesus, for they believed He had been blurred by the presentation of the "Christ" Jesus in the kerygma.

Bultmann broke up the Synoptic Gospels into individual units, attempting to show that they took shape gradually, "out of quite definite conditions and wants of life from which grows up a quite definite style and quite specific forms and **categories**."<sup>9</sup> In his view, the Early Church created concepts of Jesus' nature and work that were foreign to His own understanding. Bultmann suggested that the evangelists "superimposed upon the traditional material their own belief in the **messiahship of Jesus**."<sup>10</sup> Hence, he believed that working from the twentieth century with rationalistic, historical tools, he was able to separate the historical Jesus from the Christ of the Church's **proclamation**.<sup>11</sup> The deficiencies of this approach began to be pointed out by some of Bultmann's own students, Ernst Käsemann and Gunther Bornkamm.

Ernst Käsemann is usually viewed as the initiator of the "new quest of the historical Jesus," advanced by a group of scholars known as post-Bultmannians. He argued that the New

The English word "kerygma" is a direct cognate of the Greek *kērugma*, "proclamation," "preaching." Here the term has the more technical meaning of the preaching of the Early Church during the first thirty to forty years after Jesus' resurrection.

<sup>6</sup>Albert Schweitzer summarized the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century approaches to the problem of the historical Jesus. His own answer was that Jesus was an apocalyptic visionary whose eschatology was consistent with that of His times. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. J. M. Robinson (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1968).

<sup>8</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. J. Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 3-4.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>10</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1951), 26.

<sup>11</sup>Actually, he was unsuccessful, for he ended up believing he could not know anything about the historical Jesus.

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Testament writers themselves attributed the message they were preaching to the historical Jesus, investing Him “unmistakably with pre-eminent **authority**.”<sup>12</sup>

Another representative of this school of thought, Gunther Bornkamm,<sup>13</sup> wrote that Jesus had no messianic **consciousness** and that the Christological titles were applied to Him by Christians after the Resurrection. Variations of this theme have followed: Gerhard Ebeling<sup>14</sup> has stated that Jesus was known as Son of God before the Resurrection. Ernst Fuchs<sup>15</sup> has taken up the question of the theological legitimacy of the quest. He contends that the solution to the problem lies in seeing Jesus as the example of faith in God. When the Christian follows His example, the Christ of faith is the historical Jesus.

Several other scholars have had more confidence in the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Nils Dahl<sup>16</sup> has advanced the argument that the historical investigation of Jesus has theological legitimacy and can yield understanding of Jesus, particularly in the face of the tendencies of the church to create Him in its own image. Charles H. Dodd has argued that the Christological titles are actually **from** the earthly ministry of Jesus **and** that Jesus understood himself to be the Messiah at His **trial**.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Joachim Jeremias has argued for the necessity of basing Christianity on the teaching of Jesus as reported in the Gospels, which he believes are reliable. He further shows that one of the dangers of the form-criticism approach is that it bases Christianity on an abstraction of Christ, not the historical reality which it promises.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Ernst Käsemann, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 15-47.

<sup>13</sup>Gunther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. F. Mcluskey with J. M. Robinson (New York: Harper, 1960).

<sup>14</sup>Gerhard Ebeling, “The Question of the Historical Jesus and the Problem of Christology” in *Word and Faith*, trans. J. W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1963) 288-304.

<sup>15</sup>Ernest Fuchs, “The Quest of the Historical Jesus” in *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, trans. A. Scobie (London: SCM Press, 1964), 11-31.

<sup>16</sup>Nils Alstrup Dahl, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” *The Crucified Messiah and Other Essays* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1974) 48-89.

<sup>17</sup>Charles H. Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1970), 101-2.

<sup>18</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *The Problem of the Historical Jesus*, trans. N. Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 11-24. Joachim Jeremias *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. J. Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971).

## THE ISSUES OF METHODOLOGY

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In any responsible study, the methodologies used to analyze the data and produce the conclusions must come under scrutiny. Methods that have been subjected to scrutiny will produce stronger studies than those that have not. The study of Christology suggests at least the following areas as frontier zones for methodology.

The couplet “doing versus being” raises the issues of functional versus ontological<sup>19</sup> Christology. A Christology that primarily defines Jesus by *what He did* is a functional **Christology**. A Christology that primarily defines Jesus by who *He is* is an ontological Christology. Traditionally, these two approaches have been aligned with two different kinds of theology. Functional **Christology**<sup>20</sup> has largely been advanced by biblical theologians and exegetes, and ontological **Christology**<sup>21</sup> has largely been advanced by systematic theologians. Since functional Christologies stress Jesus’ action on the earth as a man, they tend to emphasize Jesus’ humanity at the expense of His **deity**.<sup>22</sup> Ontological Christologies stress the eternal existence of God the Son and tend to emphasize Jesus’ deity at the expense of His humanity. Notice that these are tendencies, not absolute positions. Through careful balance of the statements of the Word of God, either approach could present an orthodox position.

One of the most profound mysteries of the Christian faith is the union of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ. No subject excited more controversy than this one in the time of the church fathers. The Christological heresies that were tested and condemned in the third through fifth centuries are described later in this chapter.

Our study of Christology would not be complete unless we considered the relationship that exists in the New Testament among Christology, salvation, and the prophesied

<sup>19</sup>Ontology deals with the nature of being.

<sup>20</sup>A good example of this kind of Christology may be found in James Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980).

<sup>21</sup>A good example of this kind of Christology may be found in Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991).

<sup>22</sup>Other authors have attempted to strike a balance between the two approaches. See, for example, Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. S. Guthrie and C. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959).

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kingdom of God. For the New Testament writers, Christology does not stand alone as an abstract category of knowledge. Their primary concern is God's salvation of humankind through the one Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 28: 19–20; Acts 2:38; Rom. 1:16). Therefore, from the exegetical point of view, the existence of God's salvation on the earth creates a need for understanding the One who brought it. Once this fact is acknowledged, it is possible to take the theological point of view, wherein Christology is a discrete subject, worthy of investigation in its own right. Then, because salvation is the starting point of the New Testament's message, the cross of Christ should be taken as the central defining element, since, according to the New Testament writers, that is where our salvation was accomplished. The Cross therefore defines the organic relationship that exists between the doctrine of salvation and **Christology**, at least at the exegetical level.

There is also the issue of the prophesied kingdom of God in its relationship to Christology and salvation. When Jesus is called Christ (Messiah, "Anointed One") we immediately are in the realm of prophecy. This title carried an enormous load of prophetic meaning for the Jews, both from the Old Testament canonical books and from intertestamental apocalyptic writings. The fulfillments of many Old Testament prophecies<sup>23</sup> in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus show the inbreaking of the kingdom of God.

The importance of **acknowledging** prophecy's role here is that it helps us understand how Christianity differs from Judaism. While Judaism expected the Messiah to play a key role in the political deliverance of the nation, Christianity teaches that Jesus is truly God's Messiah, even though He declined political rulership in His first coming. In Christian theology this leads to the necessity of the Second Coming as future reality. Both of these truths are based, of course, on the teachings of Jesus reported in the New Testament. The two comings of Christ are two poles of God's plan, each necessary to the total picture of God's Messiah, Jesus. This split in prophecy is not possible in the theology of Judaism and remains one of the great barriers between these two religious systems.

<sup>23</sup>See for example, Matt. 1 through 2, where the following Old Testament passages are reported to be fulfilled:

Matt. 1:23—Isa. 7:14;

Matt. 2:6—Mic. 5:2;

Matt. 2:15—Hos. 11:1;

Matt. 2:18—Jer. 31:15.

## A NEW TESTAMENT UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS

The titles given Jesus in the New Testament help us understand Him in terms that were meaningful in the ancient world He lived in. They also help us understand His **uniqueness**.<sup>24</sup>

## LORD AND CHRIST

What kind of Christology do we have in Acts 2:22–36? Peter starts out by reminding the Jews of the miracle-working power of Jesus that they all knew about. This was important. Paul's characterization, "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:22), is accurate for both peoples. But as in any responsible proclamation of Jesus, Peter quickly begins talking about the death of Jesus—He was **crucified**,<sup>25</sup> but God raised Him from the dead! Peter and many others were witnesses to that fact. Then Peter gives a lengthy explanation of the Resurrection and some Old Testament passages that prophesied it. Using responsible hermeneutics, he proves **Psalm 16** cannot be applied only to David, but also surely applies to Jesus (Acts 2:29,31).

Jesus, now exalted to the right hand of God, has, together with the Father, poured out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). This explains the speaking in tongues and the proclaiming of the good things of God heard by the Jews from fifteen different nations who were gathered from the Dispersion for the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem. It was indeed a miraculous sign.

Next, Peter attests to the truth of the Ascension by using Psalm 110:1 (see Acts 2:34–35): "The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" This adequately explains the Lord Jesus Christ

<sup>24</sup>See Cullmann, *Christology*, 5–6.

<sup>25</sup>The scholarly debate over the speeches in the Book of Acts has seen the rise of two main positions: (1) that the speeches are accurate reports of what Peter, Paul, and others said; (2) that Luke created the speeches to fit his purposes in writing the Book of Acts. The latter view attributes more to the creativity of Luke than has traditionally been accepted.

Some works that favor the first view are George Ladd, "The Christology of Acts," *Foundations* 11 (1968) 27–41; O. J. Lafferty, "Acts 2,14–36: A Study in Christology," *Dunwoodie Review* 6 (1966): 235–53; William Ramsey, *The Christ of the Earliest Christians* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1959). Some works that favor the second view are Donald Jones, "The Title *Christos* in Luke-Acts," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 32 (1970): 69–76; Jacques M. Menard, "Pais Theou as Messianic Title in the Book of Acts," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 19 (1957): 83–92.

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who was here in the flesh on the earth and then ascended into heaven where He received His present status.

Acts 2:36 clearly declares what we must believe in order to receive the salvation of God's Messiah. "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both **Lord** and Christ." Notice the continuity expressed here. This exalted Jesus is the same Jesus who was crucified. The two titles "Lord" and "Christ" tie the prime terms in Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. The tie to Jesus' earthly ministry is significant here, for God the Father's making Jesus Lord and Christ is the ultimate stamp of approval on His life and ministry—His miracles, His signs and wonders, His teaching, His death, His resurrection.

#### SERVANT AND PROPHET

The context of Acts 3:12–26 is the healing of the man at the Beautiful Gate. On the occasion of this miracle, a crowd gathered and Peter preached to them. He began with the fact that God glorified "his servant Jesus" (v. 13) after the Jerusalem Jews killed Him. They killed Jesus even though He is "the author of life" (v. 15). What a paradox! **How** do you kill the **Author**<sup>26</sup> of life? That ought not to have happened and yet it did.

"Servant" (v. 13) is another important title of Jesus. Some versions of the Bible translate "servant" (Gk. *pais*) in this passage as "child." *Pais* can mean "child," but it should not be rendered that way in Acts 3 and 4. The child Jesus did not die on the cross; the man Jesus died, bearing the sins of the world. The context here demands the meaning "servant," for in Acts 3 a servant Christology begins to emerge. Starting with verse 18, notice how the Old Testament prophecies vindicate Jesus as the Messiah in ways that for the Jews were very unexpected. The Jews expected the Christ to rule, not suffer.

Furthermore, Peter states that Jesus will return (w. 20–21)—which is not mentioned in chapter 2. Then, after the Second Coming, God will restore everything that was prophesied in the Old Testament. Please notice that we are not now in the time of the restoration of all things. The text here clearly puts that in the future. When it is time for God to restore everything, Jesus will come back in His second coming. The Millennium will begin and the whole reality of the

<sup>26</sup>Gk. *archêgos*, "leader," "ruler," "prince," "originator."

age to come that is shown to us in several books of the Bible will be **initiated**.<sup>27</sup>

Next, Peter presents Jesus as the Prophet like Moses (w. 22–23). Moses declared, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a **prophet** like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him" (Deut. 18:15). Naturally, one would say that Joshua **fulfilled** this. Joshua, the follower of Moses, did come after him and was a great deliverer in his own time. But another Joshua came (in the Hebrew language the names Joshua and Jesus are the **same**).<sup>28</sup> The early Christians recognized Jesus as the final fulfillment of Moses' prophecy.

Then, at the end of this passage (Acts 3:25–26), Peter reminds his audience of the covenant with Abraham, which is very important in understanding Christ. "You are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him **first** to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." Clearly, Jesus now brings the promised blessing and is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, not just the fulfillment of the Law given through Moses.

#### LOGOS

John 1:1 presents Christ by means of the term *logos*. This Greek term means "word," "statement," "message," "declaration," or "the act of speech." But Oscar Cullman shows the importance of recognizing that in John 1 *logos* has a specialized meaning; it is described as a *hupostasis* (Heb. 1:3): a distinct, personal existence of an actual, real **being**.<sup>29</sup> John 1:1 shows that "the Word was **with God**; and the Word was **God**" are both true at the same **time**.<sup>30</sup> This means that there has never been a time when the *Logos* did not exist with the **Father**.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup>See chap. 18, pp. 629–30.

<sup>28</sup>Joshua (Heb. *Y'hoshu'a*), "The LORD is salvation," has a later form, *Yeshu'a*, which was transliterated into Greek as *Iêsous* and comes into the English as "Jesus."

<sup>29</sup>Cullmann, *Christology*, 25 1–52.

<sup>30</sup>Some argue that "was God" means was a god, because the Greek *theos* does not have the article *ho*, "the," in this phrase. However, *theos* without the article occurs in John 1:18, where it clearly refers to God the Father. And in Thomas' confession, "My Lord and my God," "My God" is *ho theos mou* and does have the article. Therefore, in John 1:1, "was God" needs the capital "G."

<sup>31</sup>See chap. 5, p. 148–49.

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John then shows that the Word has agency in creation. Genesis 1 :1 teaches us that God created the world. John 1:3 lets us know specifically that the Lord Jesus Christ in His **preincarnate** state actually did the work of creation, carrying out the will and purpose of the Father.

We find **also** that the Word is where life is found. John 1:4 says, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." Because Jesus is the location of life; He is the only place where it may be obtained. A quality of life is being described here, eternal life. This kind of life is available from God with His life-giving power through the Living Word. We have eternal life only as Christ's life is in us.

The world's misunderstanding of the **Logos** is hinted at in John 1:5. "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." The passage continues by saying that John the Baptist came as witness to that Light. "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did **not recognize him**" ( 1:9–10). We want to focus our attention on this point. The Creator of the world, the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, was here in the world, but the world did not recognize Him. The next verse gets more specific. "He came to that which was his own [His own place, this earth He had created], but his own [His own people, Israel] did not receive him" ( 1:11).

The heirs of the covenant, the physical descendants of Abraham, did not receive Him. Here we see a very prominent theme that runs through the Gospel of John: the rejection of Jesus. When Jesus preached, some Jews mocked. When Jesus said, "Your Father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad," the Jews in unbelief said, "You are not yet fifty years old ... and you have seen Abraham!" Then Jesus declared, "Before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:57–58). The present tense of the verb "I am" (Gk. *eimi*) indicates linear being. Before Abraham was, the Son is.

**Although** many rejected the message, some were born of God. In John 1:12 we read, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." In other words, Jesus was redefining the whole reality of becoming a child of God. Up to that time, one had to be born into or join the specific, called, covenant people, Israel, to have that opportunity. But John emphasizes here that the spiritual message, the powerful gospel, had come and people had received Jesus, the **Logos**. Receiving Him

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meant receiving the right or the authority to become children of God. Some of those who received Him were Jews and some were Gentiles. Jesus broke down the dividing wall and opened up salvation to all who would come and receive Him by faith (1:13).

The essential truth about the **Logos** who is being described here is in John 1: 14. "The Word **became flesh** and made his dwelling among us." Here we see that the term *logos* is being pressed into the service of describing Jesus Christ, but that the reality of His person is more than the secular meaning of the concept is able to bear. To the ancient philosophic Greeks, a fleshly *logos* would be an impossibility. However, to those who will believe in the Son of God, a fleshly *logos* is the key to understanding the Incarnation. In fact, this is exactly what the Incarnation means: The preexistent **Logos** took on human flesh and walked among us.

## SON OF MAN

Of **all** His titles, "Son of Man" is the one that Jesus preferred to use of himself. And the writers of the **Synoptics** used it sixty-nine times. The term "son of man" has two main possible meanings. The first meaning is simply a member of humanity. And in that sense, everybody is a son of man. That meaning does carry down to Jesus' own day from at least as far back as the Book of Ezekiel, where the Hebrew phraseology **ben 'adam** is used, with a nearly identical **meaning**.<sup>32</sup> In fact, this phrase can function simply as a synonym for the first person personal pronoun, "I" (cf. Matt. 16:13).<sup>33</sup>

However, the term is **also** used of the prophesied figure in Daniel and in the later Jewish apocalyptic literature. This person appears at the end of time to intervene dramatically and bring God's righteousness and God's kingdom and judgment to this world. Daniel 7:13–14 is the source for this **apocalyptic**<sup>34</sup> concept:

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached

<sup>32</sup>In the case of both Ezekiel and Jesus it may carry the connotation of a representative man.

<sup>33</sup>Geza Vermes, "The Use of *bar 'enash*/*bar 'enasha* in Jewish Aramaic," *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975): 147–65.

<sup>34</sup>From the Greek, *apokalupsis*, "revelation," "unveiling," used of language rich in symbolism that relates to the coming kingdom of God.

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the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

The appearance of this manlike figure before the Ancient of Days, as reported in the Book of Daniel, gave rise to much speculation, writing, and interpretation in the **intertestamental** period.

In the Book of Daniel itself, however, a question concerning the identity of the Son of Man arises from the passage starting in 7: **15**. The saints of the Most High battle against evil, against the horn, etc. But is the Son of Man an individual or is the Son of Man collectively the saints of the Most High?<sup>35</sup> The latter view was not popular in ancient times. In fact, as the Son of Man concept began to be connected more and more to glory and power and coming with clouds, which Daniel wrote about, the interpretation of the figure began to **move** in the direction of the Son of Man's being an individual: God's agent to bring about His **day**.<sup>36</sup>

The apocalyptic book 1 Enoch, which claims to be written by Enoch but was actually written in the **first** century B.C., is not inspired Scripture. Yet, historically, it is helpful for our understanding of the development of apocalyptic thought. Chapter **46** says:

And there I saw one who had a head of days, and his head was white like wool, and with him was another being whose countenance had the appearance of a man. And his face was full of graciousness like one of the holy angels. And I asked the angel who went with me and showed me all the hidden things concerning that Son of Man, who He was, whence He was, and why He went with the head of Days.<sup>37</sup>

The collective view was promoted by Ibn Ezra (A.D. 1092-1167), but did not become popular until the twentieth century. See Arthur J. Fetch. *The Son of Man in Daniel Seven* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1979), 20-27.

<sup>36</sup>Barnabas Lindars, “Re-Enter the Apocalyptic Son of Man,” *New Testament Studies* 22 (October 1975): 52-72. Also John J. Collins, “The Son of Man and the Saints of the Most High in the Book of Daniel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974): 50-66.

<sup>37</sup>R.H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 *Pseudepigrapha* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1913), 214-15.

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This passage clearly develops themes found in Daniel 7. The “head of days” is the Ancient of Days from Daniel 7, and the one who had “the appearance of a man” is the Son of Man of Daniel 7. First Enoch continues: “He answered and said unto me, ‘This is the Son of Man who has **righteousness**.’ **The** Lord of Spirits has chosen him and ... this Son of Man whom you have seen shall raise up the kings ... and break the teeth of the sinners. He shall put down the kings from their thrones and kingdoms because they do not extol and praise him.”

Notice the subtle shift that takes place here. In Daniel, **the** Lord God, the Ancient of Days, does the judging; the Son of Man simply appears before Him. Here the Son of Man becomes the agent. He breaks the teeth of the sinners and tears kings from their thrones. In other words, in the centuries between the Old and New Testaments, Jews gave the apocalyptic Son of Man a **much** more active role in bringing about God's judgment and His **kingdom**.<sup>38</sup>

When we see the phrase “Son of Man” in the Gospels, we need to ask whether it means a member of humanity or Daniel's triumphant Son of Man. Jesus seemed to choose this title because it had mystery, intrigue, and a certain hidden character to it. For Jesus, it concealed what needed to be concealed and made known what needed to be made known.

Although the title “Son of Man” has two main definitions, it has three possible New Testament contextual applications. The first of these applications is the Son of Man in His earthly ministry. The second application is in reference to His future **suffering** (e.g., Mark **8:31**). This gave new meaning to an existing terminology within Judaism. The third application is the Son of Man in His future glory (see Mark **13:24**, which draws directly on the whole prophetic stream that came forth from the Book of Daniel).

Jesus, however, was not limited to the categories that existed. Certainly the apocalyptic categories were there, but He taught new and unique things about them. Then at Jesus' trial, in His response to the high priest, we find another reference

<sup>38</sup>Matthew Black, “Aramaic *Barnasba* and the ‘Son of Man’ ” *Expository Times* 95 (1984): 200-206. Another apocalyptic book that deals with this is IV Ezra. See Howard C. Kee, “‘The Man’ in Fourth Ezra: Growth of a Tradition,” *Society of Biblical Literature 1981 Seminar Papers*, ed. K. Richards (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 199-208. See also Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1971), 257-76.



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to the Son of Man in His future glory. Mark 14:62 says, "You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Jesus here identified himself with Daniel's Son of Man. This helps us understand the divisibility of the term. The Son of Man had come and was present on the earth *and* He is yet to come with power and glory.

This divisibility is unique. Jesus came to earth, referred to himself as the Son of Man, and then did things like the healing of the paralytic and talked about His future **suffering** and death. But this understanding of the Son of Man is divided from His coming in power and glory and dominion, judging sinners and taking control. Therefore, Jesus is the Son of Man—past, present, and future.

That the Son of Man is a real man is also unique. From the Jewish apocalyptic writings, we would expect Him to be a superangelic being or a powerful associate of the Ancient of Days. That the Son of Man turns out to be Jesus on earth taking His place as truly man is remarkable.

## MESSIAH

The title "messiah" is at the center of the New Testament understanding of Jesus and became a name for Him. Its importance, then, can hardly be overestimated.

The Greek term *Christos*, "Anointed One," translated the Hebrew *mashiach*, which is rendered in our English Bibles as "**Messiah**"<sup>39</sup> or, more commonly, "Christ." From its basic meaning of anointing with olive oil, it referred to the anointing of kings, priests, and prophets for the ministry God had called them to. Later, it came to mean a specific Davidic descendant who was expected to rule the Jews and to give them victory over the Gentiles, their **oppressors**.<sup>40</sup> To many Jews, Jesus was not their kind of **Messiah**.<sup>41</sup>

Knowing that Jesus was not the only one who claimed to be the Messiah in ancient Judaism can aid our understanding of the use of the term "Messiah" (or Christ). When the Council arrested Peter and John and was considering what to do

<sup>39</sup>Cullmann, *Christology*, 113–14.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 114–16; also Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Collins, 1965), 23–31, 158–62, 191–92.

<sup>41</sup>Some critical scholars have tried to demonstrate that Jesus himself rejected this title, but they have been unsuccessful. See Marinus de Jonge, "The Earliest Christian Use of Christos: Some Suggestions," *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 321–43; also Cullmann, *Christology*, 125–27.

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about them, Gamaliel stood up and gave his advice: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, **Judas**<sup>42</sup> the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered" (Acts 5:35–37).

Josephus, in his record about Judas and other messiahs, says that crosses with the crucified bodies of insurrectionists **lined** some Roman roads in that part of the world. To every one passing by, the crosses provided an object lesson in what could happen to those who followed a Jewish messiah. We can begin to understand, then, why Jesus was not eager to have the term "Messiah" applied to **himself**.<sup>43</sup>

Jesus in **fact** avoided the term "**messiah**."<sup>44</sup> This is one of the striking things about His messiahship. For example, He responded to Peter's confession, "You are **the Christ, the Son of the living God**," by saying, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 16: 16–17). But Jesus went on to warn "his disciples **not to tell anyone** that he was the Christ" (Matt. 15:20). Jesus wanted to avoid the term because it carried with it the connotation of political and military leadership, which were not a part of His kingdom activities in His **first** coming.

This approach to the term is also evident in Jesus' dealings with demons. Luke 4:41 reads,<sup>45</sup> "Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ." Jesus would not allow himself

<sup>42</sup>Judas was a name of great honor among the Jews of this time. Judas Maccabaeus, the heroic Jewish deliverer of the second century B.C., achieved a victory over the Seleucid kingdom, breaking the yoke of their domination over the nation of Israel (1 Macc. 3:1 through 5:28).

<sup>43</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.5.2; *Wars of the Jews*, 2.8.1. Another person who seems to have been a "messiah" is "the Egyptian" (Acts 21:37–38). Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.8.6, describes this person.

<sup>44</sup>Cullmann, *Christology*, 125–26.

<sup>45</sup>There is a textual question here. Some Bibles do not have the word "Christ" (Gk *ho christos*) in the statement of the demons. Those that do include it are supported by the ancient manuscripts A, Q, Θ, Ψ, and others. For our point here, the absence or presence of *ho christos* does not matter, since it is definitely present in Luke's statement at the end of the verse.

to be swept into a messianic kingship that would avoid the cross.

Even at His trial Jesus exhibited reluctant acceptance of the title “messiah.” In Mark 14:60–62 we read, “Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?’ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. **Again** the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’ ‘I am,’ said Jesus. ‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ ” The high priest understood and was so angry that he tore his clothes.

Jesus’ reluctance can be seen especially when one looks at the context of how the question was asked and how long it took the high priest to get Jesus to confess to being the Messiah. Matthew 26:63 indicates even more reluctance, for the high priest eventually put Jesus under oath. Consequently, Jesus could not keep silent any longer. “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied” (26:64). But He was not boasting about being the Messiah or trying to establish himself as the Messiah. He simply is the Messiah.

Finally, did Jesus ever really identify himself as the Messiah? The answer is rarely. In fact, Jesus does not designate himself as the Messiah in the Synoptic Gospels; He calls himself the Son of Man. He was not interested in calling himself the Messiah for the reasons given above. Yet, when the woman at the well in **Samaria** said, “ ‘I know that Messiah’ (called **Christ**)<sup>46</sup> ‘is coming,’ ” “Jesus responded, “ ‘I who speak to you am He’ ” or “ ‘I am the One’ ” (John 4:25–26). *So* Jesus did designate himself as the Messiah. But notice where He was when He did this: in **Samaria**, not Galilee, not Jerusalem.

The key expectation in Jesus’ day was that the Messiah would be a political ruler. He would be King David’s descendant. David was the prototype Messiah, the deliverer and conqueror. Then, the Qumran community added the expectation of two Messiahs: the Messiah of Aaron, a priestly Messiah, and the Messiah of Israel, a kingly **Messiah**.<sup>47</sup> They apparently could not hold together the concepts of the political, kingly Messiah and the priestly, serving, ministering Messiah. So they divided the concept of the Messiah **into** two figures.

<sup>46</sup>John, writing in Ephesus, translates the Hebrew-Aramaic term for the benefit of Greek-speaking Gentile Christians.

<sup>47</sup>“Manual of Discipline,” 9.11 in Theodor H. Gaster, ed., *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1976) 63–64.

Perhaps at the time this was the closest to an anticipation of Christianity in Judaism, because, in a much stronger way, that is actually what Jesus was to achieve: At His **first** coming, He was the serving, priestly Messiah; He will be the kingly Messiah in the power and glory of His **second** coming. **How**ever, the Qumran **covenanters**’ viewpoint does not mean they were Christians or even incipient Christians. They were Jews. But they **definitely** had a very divergent approach to the whole question of the Messiah by proposing two figures as Messiahs.

Another aspect of the uniqueness of the title “Christ” is that it actually became a name for Jesus. And no other title **for** Jesus became a name for Him except Messiah, or Christ. Therefore, it is preeminent among all His titles. In the Acts and Epistles He is not called “Jesus Son of Man,” or “Jesus Servant”; He is Jesus **Christ** (Jesus the Messiah). Also, God’s **unique** Messiah, Jesus, *didn’t cease being the Messiah* when He died on the cross, because there He perfected salvation. Then He rose **from** the dead and ascended into the Father’s presence, where He is indeed still God’s Messiah.

#### HERESIES CONCERNING THE NATURES OF JESUS CHRIST

The doctrine of Christ has undergone more heretical attempts to explain it than any other doctrine in Christianity. The stated and implied mystery in the New Testament of the incarnation of God the Son seems to draw to itself, like a magnet, variant explanations of the **different** aspects of this crucial doctrine. Heresy about **Christ** was already present in New Testament times, as 1 John 4:1–3 clearly shows:

Dear **friends**, **do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ‘This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard** is coming and even now is already in the world.

This denial of Jesus’ fleshly existence was an early forerunner of **the** docetic heresy that plagued the Church in the second and third centuries?

In the age of the church fathers, differences existed in the handling of Scripture in the two main branches of the Church.

<sup>48</sup>See below. See also chap. 5, p. 1%.

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The School of Alexandria emphasized the allegorical approach to interpreting Scripture. These Christians became adept at defending the deity of Christ, sometimes at the expense of His full humanity. The School of Antioch emphasized the literal approach to interpreting Scripture. They defended the doctrine of Christ's humanity well, but sometimes did so at the expense of His full deity.

We must point out that the trivializing of the concept of heresy, which is often done in our times, should not be read back into the ancient times we are studying. The church **fathers** took their controversies against heretics with utmost seriousness because they understood that Christianity's very foundations were at stake in these issues. Besides their concern for the correct understanding of Scripture, the **fathers** were also guided by a persuasion that the ultimate issue was salvation itself. Many times in these controversies the question became, Can the **Christ** presented here indeed be the sacrifice for the sin of the **world**?<sup>49</sup>

## DOCETISM

**Docetists** denied the reality of Christ's humanity, saying He only seemed to **suffer** and die.<sup>50</sup> They erred by allowing Gnostic philosophy to dictate the meaning of the scriptural **data**.<sup>51</sup> In the final analysis, the Christ described by the Docetists could save no one, since His death in a human body was the condition of His destruction of the power of Satan's hold on humanity (Heb. 2: 14).

## EBIONISM

The **Ebionite**<sup>52</sup> heresy grew out of a branch of Jewish Christianity that attempted to explain Jesus **Christ** in terms of its Jewish **preunderstandings** of **God**.<sup>53</sup> For some of these early Christians, monotheism meant the Father alone was God. The

<sup>49</sup>For the development of these controversies see chap. 5, pp. 155-63.

<sup>50</sup>See chap. 5, p. 1%.

<sup>51</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 714.

<sup>52</sup>*Ebion* means "poor." It may refer to their impoverished Christology.

<sup>53</sup>An unpublished thesis, "The Problem of the Expansion of Christianity as Faced by the Hebrew Christian in New Testament Times," by Stanley M. Horton (Gordon Divinity School, June 1944), shows that the majority of the Jewish believers scattered after A.D. 70 and 135 joined orthodox christian churches.

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Pharisees' presence among the believers is attested in Acts 15:1-2,5, and Pharisaic Ebionites began to teach that Jesus **was** just a man, begotten by Joseph and Mary. Some taught that Jesus was made to be the Son of God at His baptism by John. This teaching, called adoptionism, obviously did not agree with the New Testament statements of John and **Paul**<sup>54</sup> about Christ's **origins**.<sup>55</sup>

## ARIANISM

Early in the fourth century, a man named Arius put forth his teachings with vigor, and they were believed by many people. The teachings are perhaps best understood as expressed in eight logically interlocking statements.

1. God's fundamental characteristic is solitude. He exists alone.
2. **Two** Powers dwell in God, Word and Wisdom.
3. Creation was accomplished by an independent substance that God created.
4. The Son's being is different from the Father's.
5. The Son is not truly God.
6. **The** Son is a Perfect Creation of the Father.
7. Christ's human soul was replaced by the Logos.
8. The Holy Spirit is a third created substance.

The core problem in Arius' teaching was his insistence that the Son was created by the Father. The Nicene Council dealt with this, and Athanasius successfully defended the orthodox **position**.<sup>56</sup> Although the doctrinal battle with the **Arians** raged for several decades, the Christology of Nicaea was established and remains a bulwark of orthodoxy to this day.

## APOLLINARIANISM

**Apollinaris** of Laodicea lived through almost the entire fourth century and, therefore saw firsthand the Man controversy. He participated in the refutation of Arius and shared fellowship with the orthodox fathers of his day, including **Athanasius**. In his mature years, he gave himself to contemplation of the person of Christ under the philosophic premise that two perfect beings cannot become one. He believed the **Nicene definition of the deity of Christ, but held that as a man,**

<sup>54</sup>Specifically John 1:1; 8:58; Phil. 2:6-7; Col. 1:15-20.

<sup>55</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 731.

<sup>56</sup>See chap. 5, "Trinitarian Orthodoxy," pp. 164-66.

Jesus would have spirit, soul, and body. To add the Son's complete deity to this would result in a four-part being, which to Apollinaris would be a monstrosity. The solution to this problem for Apollinaris was that the *Logos*, representing the complete deity of the Son, replaced the human spirit in the man Jesus. By this means Apollinaris accomplished the union of the divine and human in Jesus.

But what about the human nature which now existed without a spirit? To understand the Christology of Apollinaris we must understand his view of human nature. He believed that the human being comprises a body (the fleshly corpse), a soul (the animating life-principle), and a spirit (the person's mind and will). According to his teaching, Jesus' mind was the divine mind, not a human mind. But is this the Jesus presented in the New Testament? How could such a Christ be truly tempted? The orthodox fathers took these questions and others to Apollinaris. When he would not change his position, the Council of Constantinople was convened in A.D. 381, and it refuted the teaching of Apollinaris.

Here we certainly have an important question about Jesus. Did He have a human mind? Several passages seem relevant to this issue. In Luke 23:46 we read that, at the point of death, "Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.'" This indicates that the spirit was an aspect of Jesus' human existence and is mentioned here as that which returns to God at death. Hebrews 2: 14,17 reads:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too *shared in their humanity* so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil. ... 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.

Here the humanity of Jesus is said to be the same as our humanity. He is made like us in every way, apparently including having a human mind, so that the Atonement could be completed. The doctrinal implications of the heresy of Apollinaris challenge the Atonement itself.<sup>57</sup>

#### MONARCHIANISM

Among the heresies concerning the nature of the Trinity that also misinterpreted Christ's nature is Monarchianism,

which in both its dynamic and modalistic forms was deficient in its view of the person of Christ.<sup>58</sup>

#### NESTORIANISM

The teachings of Nestorius were popular in some areas of the world at the beginning of the fifth century. The controversy began as Nestorius found fault with the Church's teaching concerning Mary. Since the Council of Nicaea had asserted Jesus' full deity, it became necessary to explain Mary's status in bearing the Christ into the world. The Church of Nestorius' day was quite properly using the terminology *theotokos*, meaning "God-bearer," to describe Mary. Nestorius reacted against this terminology, teaching that Mary should be called *Christotokos*, meaning "Christ-bearer." He maintained that only Jesus should be called *theotokos*. This terminology was important to Nestorius because he wished to present Jesus as the God-bearing man.

Nestorius taught that the *Logos, as the* complete Deity, indwelt the human Jesus similarly to the way the Holy Spirit indwells the believer. In this manner, Nestorius kept the humanity and the deity at some logical distance from each other. What held them together was a moral link provided by the perfection of Jesus, according to Nestorius.

The teachings of Nestorius were examined and rejected by the Council of Ephesus, which convened in A.D. 431. The council found that the teaching of a God-bearing man drove a wedge between the divine and human natures which the moral link could not sufficiently rejoin. In the final analysis, Nestorius reduced the value of the divine nature by His denial of the personal union of the natures.

#### EUTYCHIANISM

The teaching of Eutyches was popular in some areas in the first half of the fifth century. Eutychianism began with the assertion that Jesus' body was not identical to ours, but was a special body brought into being for the messiahship of Jesus. This created the possibility, according to Eutyches, that the divine and the human were mingled together to create one nature instead of two. Therefore, in the Incarnation, Jesus was one Person with one nature, a deified humanity unlike any other humanity.

<sup>57</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 715–16.

<sup>58</sup>See chap. 5, pp. 15742.

This teaching was examined by the Council of **Chalcedon** (AD. 451). The human nature of Christ quickly was recognized to be the major issue in the teaching. The council creatively used the terminology coined at **Nicea**, that Christ was **homoousia with the** Father, to refute the teaching of Eutyches. The council **asserted** that Jesus is **homoousia hēmin**, which means He had in His humanity the same being or essence **as we**. This may seem to be a radical conclusion, but it is made necessary by several Scripture passages, not the least of which is Hebrews 2:14,17. This clear **defense** of Christ's humanity, alongside an equally clear **affirmation** of His deity, is an indication of the council members' willingness to maintain the tensions and paradox of the biblical revelation. In fact, the Chalcedonian Christology has remained in Christianity as the bulwark of orthodoxy for some fifteen centuries.

#### SYSTEMATIC CONSIDERATIONS IN CHRISTOLOGY

In the disciplined study of Jesus Christ, certain **elements** of teaching presented by the biblical text require analysis and theological synthesis beyond the exegesis of the text. Exegesis must be done first and must control the meanings we attach to the words of the **Bible**, but four elements in the doctrine of Jesus Christ need to be related to each other in a meaningful theological **framework**.

The first element is the Virgin Birth, as taught in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. This doctrine shows us the initial phase of how Jesus could be both God and man.

The second doctrine is that Jesus, in His one Person, is fully divine and fully human. Although this element brings us to the limits of our human ability to understand, we must rigorously apply ourselves to investigating the terminology and meanings in this **doctrine**.

The third theological area is the place of Jesus in the Trinity. It is essential to a proper understanding that we know how Jesus is the Son in His relationship with the Father, and how He is the Giver of the Holy **Spirit**.<sup>59</sup> This has been well discussed in chapter 5.

When we come to the fourth element of this section, we find an area that has been somewhat neglected, at least in the realm of systematic theology. When we speak of Jesus as the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, we must recognize that the **prom-**

<sup>59</sup>See chap. 5, pp. 145, 148–53.

ises of outpouring given in both Old and New Testaments have their fulfillment in the activity of Jesus Christ.

#### THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Probably no doctrine in Christianity has been scrutinized as extensively as the Virgin Birth, for two main reasons. First, the doctrine depends on the reality of the supernatural for its very existence. Many scholars in the past two centuries have had a bias against the supernatural; therefore, they have been biased in their handling of Jesus' birth. The second reason for criticism of the Virgin Birth is that the doctrine has had a history of development that takes us far beyond the simple data provided by the Bible. The term "virgin birth" itself reflects this issue. The Virgin Birth means that Jesus was conceived while Mary was a virgin, and that she was still a virgin when Jesus was born (not that the parts of Mary's body were supernaturally preserved from the course of events that take place in a human birth)?

One of the disputed aspects of the Virgin Birth is the origin of the concept itself. Some scholars have attempted to explain the origin by means of Hellenistic parallels? The unions of gods and goddesses with humans in the Greek literature of antiquity are claimed to be the antecedents of the biblical idea. But this certainly ignores the use of Isaiah 7 in Matthew 1.

Isaiah 7, with its promise of a child to come, is the background for the concept of the Virgin Birth. Much controversy has swirled around the Hebrew term '**almah**', used in Isaiah 7:14. The word is usually translated "virgin," though some versions render it "maiden" or "young woman." In the Old Testament, when the context gives a clear indication, it is used of virgins of marriageable **age**.<sup>62</sup>

Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? **Will** you try the patience of my God **also**? Therefore the Lord himself **will** give you [plural, the whole house of David] a sign: **The** virgin [**'almah**] **will** be **with child** and

<sup>60</sup>This is actually claimed in an apocryphal book called the *Protevangelion* 14:1–17.

<sup>61</sup>Morton Enslin, "The Christian Stories of the Nativity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 59 (1940): 317–38. Eduard Norden, *Die Geburt des Kindes: Geschichte einer religiösen Idee* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1924).

<sup>62</sup>Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 287.

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will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (Isa. 7:13–14).

It seems that, **in** the context of chapters 7 and 8 of Isaiah, the prophecy about the '*almah*' had a **meaning for** the time of Isaiah that was quite important. To begin with, the prophecy was spoken not to King **Ahaz**, but to the whole house of David. King **Ahaz** was facing a military threat from the combined armies of the Northern Kingdom and the nation of **Aram** (7:1–9). In an attempt to assure him that the threat would not materialize, Isaiah challenged him to ask for any spiritual sign he wished—but **Ahaz** refused. Then the Lord promised a supernatural sign not for **Ahaz**, but for the whole house of David, a sign that would have significance right down through **history**.<sup>63</sup> Notice that the child's name would be Immanuel, "God with us."

The use of Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:18–22 points out its great importance for understanding the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here the virgin conception and birth of Jesus **are** treated with respect and dignity.

The Gospel of Matthew reports that the pregnancy of Mary was caused by the action of the Holy Spirit upon her as she conceived Jesus in her womb. Joseph, Mary's pledged husband, would not believe this until he was informed by the angel. Once the conception had occurred, it became clear that it was a divine fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14.

Another feature of the birth narratives of Jesus in the Gospels is the focus taken by each writer. Matthew focuses on Joseph's role in the story. He describes the angel's appearances and Joseph's righteous actions in obedience to the commands. Luke, on the other hand, seems to tell the story **from** Mary's perspective. From Luke we learn about the events surrounding Zechariah and Elizabeth and the kinship between Mary and Elizabeth. Luke also describes the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mary (Luke 1:26–31) and Mary's beautiful response in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55).

Both Matthew and Luke use the Greek **word** *parthenos* to describe Mary as an unmarried and sexually pure young woman. In Matthew 1:23 this Greek word translates the Hebrew word '*almah*', from Isaiah 7:14. It conveys a clear **con-**

<sup>63</sup>The supernatural sign finds its complete fulfillment in the person of Jesus. However, a near fulfillment in Isaiah's time, such as the birth of a child to Isaiah's wife, that would foreshadow the fulfillment to come is proposed by some scholars.

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textual meaning that indicates the bodily virginity of Mary, who then became the mother of our Lord Jesus.

## THE HYPOSTATIC UNION

The **hypostatic** union is the description of the unity of the divine and human natures in Jesus' one Person. An adequate understanding of this doctrine is dependent on a complete understanding of each of the two natures and how they constitute the one Person.

The teaching of Scripture about the humanity of Jesus shows us that in the Incarnation He became fully human in every area of life except the actual commission of any sin.

One of the ways we know the completeness of Jesus' humanity is that the same terms that describe **different** aspects of humanity also describe Him. For example, the New Testament often uses the Greek word *pneuma*, "spirit," to describe the spirit of man; this word is also used of Jesus. And Jesus used it of himself, as on the cross He committed His spirit to His Father and breathed His last breath (Luke 23:46).

Contextually, the word "spirit" (Gk. *pneumu*) must mean the aspect of human existence that goes on in eternity after death. This point is quite important because it is as a human being that Jesus died. As God the Son, He lives eternally with the Father. In Jesus' experience of death we see one of the most powerful attestations to the completeness of His **hu-**manity. He was so human that He died a criminal's death.

The Incarnate Jesus also had a human soul. He used the Greek **word** *psuchē* to describe the workings of His inner self and emotions in Matthew 26:36–38.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be **sorrowful** and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Jesus was capable of the depths of human emotion. As we see in the Gospels, He felt pain, sorrow, joy, and hope. This was true because He shared with us the reality of being human souls.

Finally, Jesus had a human body just like ours. Blood ran through His veins as His heart pumped to sustain His human life in His body. This is clearly indicated in Hebrews 2:14–

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18. In this powerful passage, Jesus' bodily existence on earth is said to provide the very possibility for our atonement. Because He was flesh and blood, His death could defeat death and bring us to God. Jesus' body<sup>64</sup> in the Incarnation was just like our bodies. His human body was placed in a tomb after His death (Mark 15:43–47).

Another witness to the completeness of Jesus' humanity is His participation in ordinary human weakness. Although He was God, He humbled himself, taking on human form. In John 4:6 we find the simple fact that Jesus became weary, as anyone would who traveled a long distance on foot. It is clear from Matthew 4:2 that Jesus was capable of hunger in the normal human way. "After fasting forty days and forty nights, he *was hungry*." Jesus also clearly expressed a limitation of His knowledge. Speaking of the time of the Second Coming in Mark 13:32, He says, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, *nor the Son*, but only the Father." Certainly this limitation was allowed by himself under the conditions of the Incarnation, but it was a human limitation nevertheless.

The cumulative weight of these Scripture passages should cause us to conclude that Jesus was fully human. He was just like us in every respect but sin. His lowering of himself to servanthood as a man made it possible for Jesus to redeem us from sin and the curse of the Law.

The New Testament writers attribute deity to Jesus in several important passages. In John 1: 1, Jesus as the Word existed as God himself. It is hard to imagine a clearer assertion of Jesus' deity. It is based on the language of Genesis 1:1<sup>65</sup> and places Jesus in the eternal order of existence with the Father.

In John 8:58 we have another powerful witness to Jesus' deity. Jesus is asserting of himself continuous existence, like that of the Father. "I AM" is the well-known self-revelation of God to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:14). In saying "I am," Jesus was making available the knowledge of His deity to those who would believe.

Paul also gives us a clear witness to the deity of Jesus: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: *Who, being in very nature God*, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human

<sup>64</sup>Gk. *sōma*, a real body of flesh, bone, blood, muscles, etc.

<sup>65</sup>Cullmann, *Christology*, 250.

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likeness" (Phil. 2:5–7). The Greek uses very strong language here. The participle *huparchōn* is stronger than *eimi* and is a forceful statement of Christ's state of existence. The statement *hos en morphē theou huparchōn* (v. 6a) should be rendered "who, existing in the form of God." The statement *einai isa theō* (v. 6b) should be rendered "to be equal with God." The meaning Paul conveys here is that Jesus was in a state of existence in equality with God. However, He did not **grasp**, or cling, to this state, but rather released it and became a servant, dying on the cross for us.

When we use all the data of the New Testament on this subject, we realize that Jesus did not stop being God during the Incarnation. Rather, He gave up the independent exercise of the divine **attributes**.<sup>66</sup> He was still fully Deity in His very being, but He **fulfilled** what seems to have been a condition of the Incarnation, that His human limitations were real, not **artificial**.

In spite of these clear scriptural assertions of Jesus' deity, modern antsupernatural, critical scholarship has been very reluctant to accept the canonical view of Jesus' deity. Some scholars have claimed to detect a development of Christology in Early Church history, with the deity of the incarnational view standing at the end of a process of apostolic and churchly reflection on Jesus rather than at the beginning and all the way through.

John Knox's view is representative of a position held by some that Christology moved from a primitive adoptionism to kenoticism to **incarnationalism**.<sup>67</sup> Primitive adoptionism means that Jesus was taken up to be Son by the Father, without any considerations of preexistence or emptying of **Jesus**.<sup>68</sup> Kenoticism means, as Paul teaches in Philippians 2, that Jesus emptied himself of His heavenly glory for the purposes of salvation, not **necessarily incarnationally**.<sup>69</sup> The purported third stage of the development is incarnationalism, where the preexistent Son becomes a man by taking on human **flesh**.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 771.

<sup>67</sup>John Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ: A Study of Pattern in Christology* (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967).

<sup>68</sup>This position is set forth by Dunn, *Christology in the Making* I-1 1, 33–46.

<sup>69</sup>The kenosis teaching is explained thoroughly by Donald Dawe, *The Form of a Servant: A Historical Analysis of the Kenotic Motif* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

<sup>70</sup>The view of incarnationalism as historically defensible is presented by Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*.

C. F. D. Moule says, however, that incarnationism is **present** throughout the New Testament, and that Jesus **fulfilled** His deity by humbling **himself**.<sup>71</sup> By saying this, Moule reduces the sharpness of the concepts drawn by Knox and others. But it seems appropriate in light of the Synoptic Gospels to **observe** that Jesus' deity is present in *all the strands of the New Testament*, though it is most pronounced in Paul's and John's writings.

Clearly, the Bible presents ample evidence of the scriptural affirmations of both Jesus' humanity and deity. It now remains to be established how these two natures can be together in one Person.

The Council of Chalcedon, which convened in A.D. 451, is usually viewed as a **defining** moment in the history of **Christology**. Standing at the culmination of a long line of Christological heresies the council defined the orthodox faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as being focused on His two natures, divine and human, united in His one person.

The Council of Chalcedon has a historical context. The separation of the natures advanced by Nestorius had been repudiated by the Council of **Ephesus** in A.D. 431. *The* blending of the two natures proposed by Eutyches came to be refuted by Chalcedon itself. In this climate of theological controversy, two writings had profound influence over the outcome of Chalcedon. The first was Cyril's letter to John of Antioch, which says:

Therefore we confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, is complete God and complete human being with a rational soul and a body. He was born from the Father before the ages, as to his deity, but at the end of the days the same one was born, for our sake and the sake of our salvation, from Mary the Virgin, as to his humanity. This same one is coessential with the Father, as to his deity, and coessential with us, as to his humanity, for a union of two natures has occurred, as a consequence of which we confess one Christ, one Son, one Lord.<sup>72</sup>

The contribution of this statement to orthodox Christology is the concept that two complete natures were united in the

<sup>71</sup>C. F. D. Moule, "The Manhood of Jesus in the New Testament," *Christ, Faith, and History Cambridge Studies in Christology*, S. W. Sykes and J. P. Clayton, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 95-110.

<sup>72</sup>Richard A. Norris, Jr., trans. and ed., *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 141-42.

person of the Lord Jesus. The divine was identical with the divinity of the Father. The human was identical with us.

The other writing that heavily influenced Chalcedon was the letter of Leo I to Flavian of Constantinople, which states:

**This birth in time in no way detracted from that divine and eternal birth and in no way added anything to it. Its entire meaning was worked out in the restoration of humanity, which had been led astray. It came about so that death might be conquered and that the devil, who once exercised death's sovereignty, might by its power be destroyed, for we would not be able to overcome the author of sin and of death unless he whom sin could not stain nor death hold took on our nature and made it his own.**<sup>73</sup>

The emphasis here is on Jesus' humanity providing the possibility of the defeat of Satan, which Jesus did accomplish on the cross. Death could be defeated only by death, but the death was that of the perfect Lamb.

The actual findings of Chalcedon constitute a lengthy document. The Council of Nicea with **its homoousia formulation on the relationship between the Father and the Son was affirmed, along with the findings of the Council of Constantinople. The essence of the Christology of Chalcedon may be seen in the following extract.**

Following, therefore, the holy fathers, we confess one and the same Son, who is our Lord Jesus Christ, and we all agree in teaching that this very same Son is complete in his deity and complete-the very same-in his humanity, truly God and truly a human being, this very same one being composed of a rational soul and a body, coessential with the Father as to his deity and coessential with us-the very same one-as to his humanity, being like us in every respect apart from sin ... acknowledged to be unconfusedly, unalterably, undividedly, inseparably in two natures, since the difference of the natures is not destroyed because of the union, but on the contrary, the character of each nature is preserved and comes together in one person and one hypostasis, not divided or torn into two persons but one and the same Son.<sup>74</sup>

Therefore, the person of the Lord Jesus comprises two distinct realities, the divine and the human. Because Chal-

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 146.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 159.



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cedon located the union in the *person* of Christ, using the Greek word *hupostasis*, the doctrine is often called the hypostatic union.

We see that the divine nature and the human nature come together in the one person of Jesus Christ. When we speak of qualitatively different topics, such as a divine nature and a human nature existing in a union, we must inevitably take the issue of contradiction and paradox seriously. As normally understood, God is God and humanity is humanity and there is a qualitative distinction between them. When we say that Christ is the God-man, we are bringing together categories that normally negate each other. There are two responses to this dilemma. The first is to make adjustments to the human nature of Jesus, making it to fit logically in its union with the divine nature. The second is to assert that the union of the two natures is a paradox. Here the logical inconsistency of God's being a man is not resolved.

Two approaches to the problem of Christ's human nature have been taken in recent times. Both assume the veracity of the divine nature, so the issue becomes one of a clear delineation of the human nature.

Scripture passages that force this issue on us seem to be Hebrews 2:16–18 and Hebrews 4:15.

**Surely it is not angels that he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 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. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.**

**We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are yet without sin**

These two passages insist on the identity of Jesus' temptations with our own. This insistence must be given its due in the understanding of Christ's humanity that we formulate.

Millard Erickson has brought forth a modern rendition of incarnational theology in which he attempts to solve the problem of Christ's human nature in the hypostatic union. He believes that the answer lies in seeing Jesus' humanity as ideal humanity, or humanity as it will be. In other words, methodologically, we do not begin with the acute difficulty of God's becoming a man with all the qualitative differences

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between the divine and human natures. Erickson wishes to begin instead with essential humanity (i.e., what God originally created), because, presumably, it is much more like God than the fallen humanity we observe today. "For the humanity of Jesus was not the humanity of sinful human beings, but the humanity possessed by Adam and Eve from their creation and before their fall."<sup>75</sup>

In perspective, it may seem that Erickson has offered a proper and orthodox viewpoint on Jesus' humanity. However, several questions may be asked:

First, why is it wrong to begin with the unlikeness of God and man? Even if we focused on the humanity of Adam and Eve before the Fall, where is the biblical data that would indicate that Adam could easily or ever become a God-man? Erickson himself (in dialogue with Davis) has pointed out that deity is necessary, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and incorporeal, while humanity is contingent, finite, nonomnipotent, nonomniscient, and corporeal. These differences exist whether we are discussing humanity before or after the Fall.<sup>76</sup>

Second, when Erickson says that we gain our understanding of human nature from "an inductive investigation of both ourselves and other humans as we find them about us," he indicates a part of the problem. Our view of humanity should come first from the Scriptures, then from our own observations. This point is more important than it may seem, as we consider the following. Erickson says that in our present condition we are "impaired, broken-down vestiges of essential humanity, and it is difficult to imagine this kind of humanity united with deity." But is this a correct picture of the humanity that Mary brought to the virgin conception of Jesus? In Luke 1:28–30 we read:

The angel went to her and said to her, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God"

The point of the birth narratives, as the angel declares to Mary in the verses that follow, is that Jesus will be the Son of God and the son of Mary.<sup>77</sup> So then, if we take a different

<sup>75</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 736.

<sup>76</sup>Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh*, 554–556.

<sup>77</sup>Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, 347–50.

theological perspective on humanity and sin, **methodologically** we may wish to allow the contradictions in the Incarnation to stand, depending on God's revealing power to bring together that which logically may not seem to belong **together**. Ultimately, the truth of the Incarnation does not depend on our ability to logically process it as much as it depends on the fact that God supernaturally revealed it.<sup>78</sup>

Another issue that could be raised here is the extent of Jesus' participation in our human condition. The curse on Adam that resulted from his rebellion against God is recorded in Genesis 3:17–19. The curse seems to have three components: (1) a curse on the ground, (2) labor by human beings to provide food, and (3) **physical** death. Notice that Jesus participated in all of these in the days of His flesh. The curse on the ground was not lifted for Jesus; He worked as a carpenter; He ate food; and most significant, He died. In His humanity, Jesus participated in the nonmoral results of sin (Adam and Eve's) *without becoming sinful himself*. This understanding is in harmony with several important Scripture verses on the subject (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22).

Finally, a few things need to be said on the issue of the differences between essential (or ideal) humanity as created by God and existential humanity (viewed as experienced by people in everyday life). Erickson says that it is incorrect for us to **define** Jesus' humanity from the standpoint of existential humanity, that only essential humanity will do. But our analysis of the Scripture verses above would seem to indicate that Jesus was in both aspects at the same time. He was in **the** linear, corporeal existence of a man who could, and did, die. In that sense He seemed to be in an existential humanity. He also **was** sinless and there is no other human being who was and He was raised by the Father to incorruption. Jesus' essential humanity seems to be present in these realities. The revelation of God the Son in the flesh may well challenge to the point of exhaustion our attempts to explain it. What is

<sup>78</sup>It has been suggested that the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation made it possible for Jesus to hold in the one Person a complete set of divine qualities and a complete set of sinless human qualities, but in such a way that they did not interfere with each other. Down through history, Christians as a whole have regarded the Incarnation as a mystery. See James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), 18.

crucial for us to believe is that Jesus was completely human and that He was like us.<sup>79</sup>

#### JESUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus is in a profound relationship with the Third Person of the Trinity. To begin with, the Holy Spirit accomplished the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb (Luke 1:34–35).

*The* Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at His baptism (Luke 3:21–22). There Jesus moved into a new aspect of His relationship to the Holy Spirit that could be possible only in the Incarnation. Luke 4:1 makes it clear that Jesus was prepared by this empowering to face Satan in the wilderness and to inaugurate His earthly ministry.

Jesus' baptism has played a key role in Christology, and we must examine it in some depth here. James Dunn argues at length that Jesus was adopted as the Son of God at His baptism. Therefore, its significance for Dunn is Jesus' initiation to divine **sonship**.<sup>80</sup> But does Luke 3:21–22—where a voice from heaven says, "You are my Son, whom I love" "—teach this?

That Psalm 2:7 is being used here is widely acknowledged. The question that must bear on our discussion is why the second part of the statement, "Today I have become your Father," found in that psalm has been left out. If the desired teaching (by the Voice from heaven and by Luke) is that Jesus became the Son of God at His baptism, it makes no sense that the second statement would be excluded, since it might seem to prove the **point**.<sup>81</sup> The statement of Jesus' **sonship**, then, is more likely an acknowledgment of what was already a fact. It is especially important here to notice that Luke 1:35 states, "The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." Howard Ervin sums up the point well: "Jesus is the Son of God by nature. He never was, is not, and never will be other than the Son of God. ... There is no sense in which Jesus 'only becomes' Messiah and **Son** at Jordan."<sup>82</sup>

Finally, Jesus is the key player in the outpouring of the Holy

<sup>79</sup>J. Rodman Williams, however, describes the union of the divine and human in Jesus as the ultimate paradox. *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, 342.

<sup>80</sup>James Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 27–28. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 12–64.

<sup>81</sup>The Hebrew is rather a technical formula used by kings who brought out a son and declared him to be king, co-ruler with his father (as David did with Solomon).

<sup>82</sup>Howard M. Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), 12 (emphasis mine).

CHAPTER  
9The Lord  
Jesus  
Christ

Spirit. After accomplishing redemption through the Cross and the Resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven. From there, together with the Father, He poured out and continues to pour out the Holy Spirit in **fulfillment** of the prophetic promise of Joel 2:28–29 (Acts 2:33). This is one of the most important ways we know Jesus today, in His capacity as giver of the Spirit.

The cumulative force of the New Testament is quite significant. Christology is not just a doctrine for the past. Nor is Jesus' high-priestly **work**<sup>83</sup> the only aspect of His present reality. The ministry of Jesus, and no one else, is propagated by the Holy Spirit in the present. The key to the advance of the gospel in the present is the recognition that Jesus can be known, as the Holy Spirit empowers believers to disclose Him.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How is knowledge of Jesus Christ the same as knowledge of other subjects? How is it **different**?
2. How does ontological Christology **differ** from **functional** Christology?
3. What is the meaning of the phrase "hypostatic union" when it is applied to Christ?
4. What meaning was intended by the Nicene Fathers' use of the term *homoousia* for Christ?
5. How does the meaning of the title *Logos* in John 1 compare with its meaning in Greek philosophy?
6. What are the possible meanings for the title "Son of Man" as used in the Synoptic Gospels?
7. Why did Jesus avoid the title "Messiah" and command the disciples to silence when they used it of Him?
8. What is the uniqueness of Jesus as the Messiah?
9. What is meant by the terms "adoptionism," "**kenoticism**," and "incarnationalism"?
10. What is the significance of the Council of **Chalcedon** for the doctrine of Christ?

<sup>83</sup>See Heb. 6:19 through 10:39 for a scriptural description of Jesus' high-priestly work

CHAPTER TEN*The Saving  
Work of Christ**Daniel B. Pecotu*

The saving work of Christ stands as the central pillar in the structure of God's redemptive temple. It is the load-bearing support, without which the structure could never have been completed. We could also see it as the hub around which all of God's revelational activity revolves. It gives a head to the body, **antitype** to type, substance to shadow. These statements do not in the least diminish the importance of all God did for and with the Old Testament covenant people and the nations that surrounded them. That remains of incalculable significance to every student of the Scriptures. They reflect, rather, the thought of Hebrews 1:1-2: "In the **past** God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." God spoke infallibly and **significantly** in the past, but not **finally**. That had to wait for His Son's coming, the record and meaning of which appears infallibly and finally in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament canon.'

## THE MEANING OF "SALVATION"

A study of the saving work of Christ must begin with the Old Testament. There we discover in divine action and word the redemptive nature of God. We discover types and **specific** predictions of the One who was to come and of what He was going to do. Part of what we **find** is in the Old Testament's **use** of terminology to describe both natural and spiritual salvation.

<sup>1</sup>See chap. 3, pp. 108–09, for a discussion of the reasonableness of affirming that the canon of Scripture is closed.

Anyone who has studied the Hebrew Old Testament knows the richness of its vocabulary. The writers use several words that refer to the general thought of "deliverance" or "salvation," whether natural, legal, or spiritual.<sup>2</sup> The focus here is on two verbs, *natsal* and *yasha'*. The former occurs 212 times,<sup>3</sup> most often with the meaning of "deliver" or "rescue." God told Moses that He had come down to "rescue" Israel from the hand of the Egyptians (Exod. 3:8). Sennacherib wrote to the king, "The god of Hezekiah will not rescue his people from my hand" (2 Chron. 32: 17). Frequently the Psalmist pled for divine rescue (Pss. 22:21; 35:17; 69:14; 71:2; 140:1). These uses indicate that a physical, personal, or national "salvation" is in view.

But the word takes on connotations of spiritual salvation through the forgiveness of sins. David appealed to God to save him from all his transgressions (Ps. 39:8).<sup>4</sup> In Psalm 51: 14 it appears that David had personal spiritual restoration and salvation in mind when he prayed: "Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness."

Although Psalm 79 is a lament because of the invasion of Israel and the desecration of the temple by their enemies, the Psalmist recognized that a deliverance would be possible only if it included the forgiveness of their sins (v. 9).

The root *yasha'* occurs 354 times, the largest concentration of occurrences being in the Psalms (136 times) and the Prophetic Books (100 times). It means "save," "deliver," "give victory," or "help." On occasion the word occurs free of any theological overtones (e.g., when Moses defended the daughters of Reuel and saved them from the oppressive action of the shepherds; Exod. 2:17). Most often, however, the word is used with God as the subject and God's people as the object. He delivered them from all kinds of distress, including such things as national or personal enemies (Exod. 14:30; Deut.

<sup>2</sup>See the following verbs in the appropriate stems: *ga'al*, "redeem," "set free"; *chayah*, "make alive," "revive"; *chalats*, "break away," "deliver," "set free"; *yathar*, "remain over," "save over" (i.e., "preserve alive"); *malat*, "slip away," "escape," "deliver"; *padabab*, "ransom"; *palat*, "escape," "deliver"; *shuv*, "turn back," "return." In all stems, and sometimes with many meanings, these verbs occur over 1750 times. The number of verbs that convey some idea of "rescue" or "salvation" and the frequency of their occurrence indicate the pervasiveness of these ideas in Hebrew thinking and culture.

<sup>3</sup>Primarily in the *biphl* stem, which stresses causation.

<sup>4</sup>Although even here the emphasis is more on the effect of his sin in exposing him to the scorn of fools.

20:4; Judg. 3:9; Jer. 17:14-18) and from calamities (e.g., plague or famine; 2 Chron. 20:9). Therefore, Yahweh is "Savior" (Isa. 43: 11-12), "my Savior" (Ps. 18:14), and "my salvation" (2 Sam. 22:3; Ps. 27:1).

God most often chose to use His appointed representatives to bring salvation, but "the obstacles surmounted were so spectacular that there unquestionably had to be special help from God himself."<sup>5</sup> In Ezekiel the word takes on moral qualities. God promises, "I will save you from all your uncleanness" (36:29); "I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them" (37:23).

When one reads the Old Testament and takes its message seriously and literally,<sup>6</sup> one can easily conclude that a dominant theme is salvation, God being the chief actor. The salvation theme appears as early as Genesis 3: 15 in the promise that the offspring, or "seed," of the woman will "crush the serpent's head." "This is the *protevangelium*, the first glimmer of a coming salvation through Him who will restore man to life."<sup>7</sup> Yahweh saved His people through judges (Judg. 2:16,18) and other leaders, such as Samuel (1 Sam. 7:8) and David (1 Sam. 19:5). Yahweh saved even Aram of Syria, the enemy of Israel, through Naaman (2 Kings 5:1). There is no savior apart from the Lord (Isa. 43:11; 45:21; Hos. 13:4).

The *locus classicus* for the theological usage of *yasha'* in the narrative texts is Exodus 14, where Yahweh "saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians" (v. 30). That event became the prototype for what the Lord would do in the future in saving His people. All of this pointed to the time when God would bring salvation through the suffering Servant to all, not just to Israel. In Isaiah 49:6 He says to the Servant, "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." The "acts of salvation in the [Old Testament] build toward the final act of salvation which will include all people under its possible blessing."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>John E. Hartley, "Yasha'," in R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 415.

The literal approach looks for no hidden meanings known only to some spiritually elite "gnostic." It simply accepts at face value the literal, historical, and cultural meaning of the words, except when by reason of context, literary genre, figures of speech, etc., one cannot and should not do otherwise.

<sup>7</sup>J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 279.

<sup>8</sup>Hartley, *Theological Wordbook*, vol. 1, 416.

With regard to the concept of “save,” “rescue,” or “deliver,” **the** lexical richness evident in the Old Testament does not occur in the New Testament.<sup>9</sup> It uses primarily the word *sōzō*—meaning “save,” “preserve,” or “rescue from danger”—and its derived forms.<sup>10</sup> In the Septuagint, *sōzō* occurs some **three-fifths** of the time for *yasha’*, and *sōtēria* is used mostly for derivatives of *yasha’*. The Hebrew term underlies the &me the angel announced to Joseph: “**You** are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). “That the meaning of the name was thoroughly well known ... is attested by the Alexandrian Jewish exegete and philosopher... **Philo** when he interprets Joshua’s name as follows: *Iēsous sōtēria kyrtou*, Jesus means salvation through the **Lord**.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, **the** word the New Testament employs when speaking of the saving work of Christ reflects Old Testament ideas.

*Sōzō* can refer to saving one from physical death (Matt. 8:25; Acts 27:20,31), from physical illness (Matt. 9:22; Mark 10:52; Luke 17:19; James 5:15), from demonic possession (Luke 8:36), or **from** a death that has already occurred (Luke 8:50). But by **far** the greatest number of uses refers to spiritual salvation, which God provided through Christ (1 Cor. 1:21; 1 Tim. 1:15) and which people experience by **faith** (Eph. 2:8).

Although the title “savior” (Gk. *sōtēr*) **was** attributed by the Greeks to their gods, political leaders, and others who brought honor or benefit to their people, in Christian literature it was applied only to God (1 Tim. 1:1) and to Christ (Acts 13:23; Phil. 3:20). The noun “salvation” (Gk. *sōtēria*) appears forty-five times and refers almost exclusively to spiritual salvation, which is the present and future possession of all true **believers**.<sup>12</sup> But even though the Greek words for “save” or “salvation” may be infrequent, Jesus himself **pro-**

<sup>9</sup>Many words and expressions relate to the nature and effect of Christ’s work. They are part of the discussion later in this chapter.

<sup>10</sup>They appear about 180 times. The compound *diasōzō*, “bring safely through,” “save,” “rescue,” is not used in a religious sense. Two others are *exaireō* and *bruomai*. Both words mean “rescue,” “deliver,” with emphasis on natural rescue (Acts 7:10; 12:11; 2 Tim. 4:17; 2 Pet. 2:7,9). Some uses have theological significance (Rom. 7:24; Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 1:10).

<sup>11</sup>Karl H. Rengstorff, “Jesus, Nazarene, Christian,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, ed., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 332. In the Old Testament, nine persons and one village bear the name “Joshua” (*yēboshua’*), or its later form “Jeshua” (*yeshua’*).

<sup>12</sup>See Acts 7:25; 27:34; and Heb. 11:7 for exceptions.

claims the theme of the New Testament when He says, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save [*sōsai*] what was lost” (Luke 19:10).

#### THE NATURES OF GOD AND OF HUMANKIND

**The** Bible, therefore, reveals a God who saves, a God who redeems. Two questions may arise: What makes spiritual salvation necessary? What makes it possible? The answers we give relate to how we view the natures of both God and humanity. What if God had not been the kind of God the Bible reveals to us, and what if we had not been created in the image of God and subsequently fallen? Salvation as the Bible describes it would be neither possible nor necessary. Therefore, the redemptive drama has as its backdrop the character of God and the nature of His human creation.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that all people need a Savior and that they cannot save themselves. From the attempt of the first pair to cover themselves and in fear to hide from **God** (Gen. 3), and from the **first** angry rebellion and murder (Gen. 4) to the final rebellious attempt to thwart God’s purposes (Rev. 20), the Bible is one long litany of the degraded attitude and willful sinning of the human race. Modern Enlightenment thinking, which most often reflects Pelagian **ideas**,<sup>13</sup> has committed itself to the belief in humanity’s essential goodness. In spite of all that she had seen and experienced, Anne Frank in her diary concluded, “I still believe that people are really good at **heart**.”<sup>14</sup> Much modern thinking appears to believe that what we need is educating, not saving; a campus, not a cross; a social planner, not a propitiating Savior. All such optimistic thinking stands in direct contradiction to the teaching of the Scriptures.

In the fiery cloud and pillar, in the thunder and darkness of Sinai, and in the establishment of the sacrificial system with all its prescriptions and proscriptions, God sought to make certain the people understood there was a gulf between himself and them that only He could bridge. At times we may tire when we read all the details of who and when and how and what God required and accepted. What can it mean to us who live in the era of the new covenant? Possibly that God says to all of us, “If you want to approach me, it must be on

<sup>13</sup>Including the denial of original sin.

<sup>14</sup>Anne Frank *The Diary of a Young Girl*, trans. B. M. Mooyaart-Doubleday (New York: The Modern Library, Random House, 1952), 278.

my terms. You have no right to make up your own way." Nadab and Abihu learned that suddenly (Lev. 10:1-2; Num. 3:4), and all Israel with them. Could the experience of Ananias and Sapphira be a parallel example (Acts 5:1-11)? God will not allow any toying with what His holiness requires.

#### GOD'S HOLINESS AND LOVE

Since we are unholy and God is pure holiness, how can we even think of approaching Him? We can because He both chose and made the way: the cross of Christ. The New Testament has numerous references to "sins" or "sinners" linked with His death. Note a few: "He was delivered over to death for our sins" (Rom. 4:25). "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). "Christ died for sins once for all" (1 Pet. 3:18). One cannot possibly take the New Testament statements seriously and deny they teach Jesus Christ died to bridge the gulf between a holy God and a sinful race that could not save itself.

When we consider the characteristics of God it is important to avoid any tendency to treat God's attributes in a way that essentially destroys the unity of His nature.<sup>15</sup> When the Bible says, "God is love," it uses the noun to describe Him, not the adjective "loving," the latter being a weaker characterization. Although the Bible does speak about the righteousness, holiness, justice, or goodness of God, it does not say God is righteousness, or God *is* goodness.<sup>16</sup> This has led some to affirm: "In the reality of God, love is more fundamental than, and prior to, justice or power." And: "If power, control, and sovereignty are the preeminent divine qualities according to Calvinism, then love, sensitivity, and openness, as well as reliability and authority, are the essential qualities of God for

<sup>15</sup>See Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 34, 36, and 165, and Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, 36, for examples of such a tendency. But note an appeal for balance in Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1941), 368.

<sup>16</sup>We need to recall, however, that the Bible also says that "God is light" (1 John 1:5) and that He is "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Surely these metaphors are equivalent to saying "God is holiness" or "God is righteousness."

Arminians."<sup>17</sup> But in any discussion of God's nature we must not see it as one attribute superseding another, or keeping in check or balancing another. All the terms the Bible uses to describe the character of God are equally essential qualities of His nature. So in Him, holiness and love, righteousness and goodness do not stand in opposition to each other.

The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, reveals God as a God of absolute holiness (Lev. 11:45; 19:2; Josh. 24:19; Isa. 6:3; Luke 1:49) and righteous justice (Ps. 119: 142; Hos. 2:19; John 17:25; Rev. 16:5).<sup>18</sup> He cannot and will not tolerate or excuse unholiness or unrighteousness (Hab. 1:13).<sup>19</sup> We can see this in His judging Adam and Eve; in His destroying humankind by the Flood; in His commanding Israel to exterminate the Canaanites, whose iniquity had now "reached its full measure" (Gen. 15:16); in judging His own chosen people; in the final judgment of all who have spurned His Son; and, most important, in the Cross.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Pinnock, *Grace of God*, 35, 130. Has this tendency to elevate one divine attribute over another contributed to the great gulf that separates Calvinists from Arminians? This is not to suggest that attempting to see God holistically will eliminate all differences of opinion, but would it help? When the Bible says, " 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son' " (John 3:16), does that mean His justice was inactive? Romans 3:25-26 gives the lie to that idea. Granted that when God acts in a particular way (e.g., in judgment) His justice and holiness are more evident. But does He cease to weep when He does judge? Luke records that Jesus wept over Jerusalem and then proceeded to prophesy its terrifying destruction (19:41-44).

See Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, 379, the last three paragraphs of his excursus on theories of the Atonement, for an appeal to think of God holistically, especially in relation to the work of salvation. The biblical concept of love does not "embrace antithesis," says Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 394. See David W. Diehl, "Righteousness," in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 952.

<sup>18</sup>"Even though there is no distinction between righteousness and justice in the biblical vocabulary, theologians often use the former to refer to the attribute of God in himself and the latter to refer to the actions of God with respect to his creation" (Diehl, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 953).

<sup>19</sup>That God's nature forbids His tolerating evil is a given to the prophet. That accounts for his bewilderment, because God appears to be doing so.

<sup>20</sup>Of course, God does not express His righteousness and justice only in judgment. In his farewell speech, Samuel alludes to the Exodus and the period of the judges and says, " 'I am going to confront you with evidence . . . as to all the righteous acts performed by the LORD for you and your fathers' " (1 Sam. 12:7). In the New Testament, 1 John 1:9 affirms that, God will forgive because He is righteous.

At the same time, however, the Scriptures show that for a time God was willing to overlook humanity's ignorance in relation to idol worship, though now He commands all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:29–30). In past generations He “let all nations go their own way” (Acts 14:16), *though* now He wants them “to turn from these worthless things” (14:15). Paul says that in the Cross God sought to demonstrate His justice “because in his forbearance he had left sins committed beforehand unpunished” (Rom. 3:25). He endured for four hundred years the gross iniquity of the Amorites (Gen. 15:13), though eventually His judgment fell with irresistible might. The Lord will “not acquit the guilty” (Exod. 23:7) and “accepts no bribes” (Deut. 10:17). “He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity” (Ps. 98:9). Proverbs 17:15 says, “Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the LORD detests them both.” Those who test God's patience “are storing up wrath ... for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom. 2:5).

Attempts to weaken the meaning of these words that describe God and His actions, perhaps by seeing them as exaggerated expressions of God's displeasure at people's disobedience, lead to semantic nonsense. For if we refuse to understand them in their full strength, what can we say about those terms that describe His love and grace? To weaken one group is to weaken the other. The Cross and all it implies can have meaning only in view of a righteous and holy God who requires judgment. If it were not so, then Christ's agony in Gethsemane and His excruciating death become merely scenes in a passion play. Besides, they make a mockery of a loving God. If He really is not so angry with sin that He requires judgment, then the Cross becomes the most loveless act ever seen.

#### GOD'S GOODNESS, MERCY, AND GRACE

The Bible shows that we must take into account the divine nature as holy and righteous when considering its message of salvation. Yet, it just as equally reveals God's nature to be good in its very essence. The Old Testament continually **affirms** that the Lord is good (Heb. *tov*) and that He does only good things. The Psalmist invites us to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8). He declares, “The LORD is good” (100:5), and he says to the Lord, “You are good, and what *you* do is good” (119:68). One writer states, “The word ‘good’

is the most comprehensive term used when praising **excellence** of something.” When applied to God it implies the absolute perfection of this characteristic in Him. There is nothing in Him to make Him “nongood.” Therefore, God's redemptive activity expresses His goodness, as is evident when the Bible says that He does not want (Gk. *boulomai*) “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).<sup>21</sup>

The goodness of God that moved Him to hold off judgment and to save lost humankind finds expression in several key ideas (although they do not appear the most frequently with reference to God's affective characteristics). The Bible clearly **affirms** His patience, long-suffering, and forbearance, the Old Testament writers expressing it most often by the phrase “slow to **anger**.”<sup>22</sup> The primary word in the New Testament follows the pattern of the Hebrew. In 2 Peter we read that the Lord “is patient [ Gk. *makrothumēi* ] with you, not wanting anyone to perish” (3:9). Peter says, “Our Lord's patience [ Gk. *makrothumia* ] means salvation” (2 Pet. 3:15). In Romans 2:4 Paul uses *anochē* (which means “restraint,” “forbearance,” or “**patience**”<sup>23</sup>) in warning those who judge others while they do the same things themselves—against showing “contempt for the riches of his [God's] kindness, tolerance and patience.” In some respects, God's patience reflects a reactive rather than a proactive **reason**<sup>24</sup> for providing salvation through Christ. But were it not for His forbearance would anyone be saved?

<sup>21</sup>Douglas Miller, “Good, the Good, Goodness,” in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 470, 471.

This verse does not support the contention that *boulomai* reflects the willing of “determination” and *thelō* of “inclination.” See the discussions in Joseph H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), for *thelō*, 285, 286, and Dietrich Muller, “Will, Purpose,” in *New International Dictionary*, vol. 3, 1015–18 for *boulomai*.

<sup>22</sup>It appears nine times in the NIV (e.g., Exod. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17). In Jer. 15:15 the NIV translates the same Hebrew phrase “long-suffering.”

<sup>23</sup>There is no clear distinction between *makrothumia* and *anochē*. The former “is undoubtedly less active and vigorous. ... Furthermore, it has stronger eschatological overtones, looking forward to God's final judgment, whereas *anochē* denotes the period of God's gracious forbearance with particular reference in Rom. to Israel and the period up to the cross of Christ” (Ulrich Falkenroth and Cohn Brown, “Patience, Steadfastness, Endurance,” in *New International Dictionary*, vol. 2, 767). *Anochē* appears only twice in the New Testament—here and in Rom. 3:25.

<sup>24</sup>One should recall, however, that God's love, grace, mercy, and sovereign decision to redeem are all proactive.



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The Bible reveals God's saving nature in its description of His mercy. Mercy is not so much a quality as it is an action. Patience requires no action; mercy does, though we must avoid seeing any kind of dichotomy between the two. The essential idea of mercy requires a condition in which the recipient of mercy has no claim of merit on the mercy giver. If merit is present, mercy ceases. The superior position of the mercy giver, however, does not lead to patronizing. Rather, God humbled himself and became one of us—the ultimate expression of mercy.

In the Old Testament, five important word groupings refer to God's mercy, compassion, or **kindness**.<sup>25</sup> When reflecting on what God had done in the past for the covenant people, Isaiah says, "In his love [Heb. *'abavab*] and mercy [Heb. *chem-lab*] he redeemed them" (63:9). David compares the compassion (Heb. *rachem*) of the Lord with the compassion of a father (Ps. 103:13). Psalm 1 16:5 says, "Our God is full of compassion" (Heb. *rachem*). The New Testament uses primarily *eleos* and its derived forms, found mostly in Paul's writings (twenty-six times) and in Luke and Acts (twenty times). In the Synoptics<sup>26</sup> the verb (Gk. *eleeō*) appears mostly in appeals for mercy to Jesus, "son of David" (Matt. 9:27; Mark 10:47), whereas in the Epistles the word refers primarily to God as He does or does not show mercy (Rom. 9:15–18; 1 Pet. 2:10). Mercy is both human (Matt. 23:23; James 3:17) and divine (Rom. 15:9; Heb. 4:16; 1 Pet. 1:3).

Four passages in the New Testament that bring mercy and salvation together call for special attention. First, in Luke 1, the great chapter that introduces God's final redemption, the word "mercy" occurs five times (w. 50, 54, 58, 72, 78).<sup>27</sup> In the Magnificat, Mary rejoices in God for being "mindful of the humble estate of his servant" (v. 48), but she includes all "who fear him" (v. 50) and "his servant Israel" (v. 54) in the

<sup>25</sup>They are *chamal*, "spare" or "pity"; *racham*, "have compassion"; *chanan*, "be gracious"; *chus*, "look with pity"; and, probably the most important, *chesedh*, "love" or "kindness." These words also refer to the mercy humans express. The Hebrew concepts have a legal, covenantal background, differing from the predominantly psychological slant of the Greek. See Hans-Helmut Esser, "Mercy, Compassion," in *New International Dictionary*, vol. 2, 594.

<sup>26</sup>None of the words in this group appear in any of the Johannine writings, possibly because the notion of love predominates.

Verse 58 has no redemptive slant. The word "love" is noticeable for its absence. Luke seeks to emphasize God's mercy in providing salvation, a thought that parallels the Old Testament with its stress on *chesedh*.

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mercy of God.<sup>28</sup> Zechariah's inspired prophecy especially shows the connection between mercy and salvation. In the first stanza he emphasizes a coming Exodus-like salvation "to show mercy to our fathers" (v. 72). But in the second he sings of "the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God" (w. 77–78).

Second, in Romans 11:28–32, as Paul concludes his discussion of Israel's place in God's plan, he refers to the bestowal of God's mercy on once-disobedient Gentiles in order that the now-disobedient Israelites may receive mercy. Paul says that God has imprisoned humankind as a **whole**<sup>29</sup> in disobedience so that all may see that salvation depends on mercy, not national identity.<sup>30</sup>

Third, in Ephesians 2:4–5 Paul shows the working of God's love, mercy, and grace in saving us. The Greek text reads more literally, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, made [us] alive with Christ." The richness of His mercy moved Him to save.

Fourth, in Titus 3:4–5 Paul joins mercy with two other tender words. God manifested His **kindness**<sup>31</sup> and **love**<sup>32</sup> when He saved us, "not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18:23–34 illustrates the New Testament teaching regarding God's mercy. Even though the first servant owed a debt that was impossible to pay, the master did not seek unmercifully to extract it from him. Rather, he graciously forgave him. In Christ, God has done that for us.

Another way in which God shows His goodness is in saving grace. The words for the idea of grace that the Old Testament uses most often are *chanan*, "show favor" or "be gracious," and its derived forms (especially *chen*), and *chesedh*, "faithful lovingkindness" or "unfailing love." The former usually refers

<sup>28</sup>Often the prophetic person uses the past tense to refer to future events, for in God's eyes it is as good as done. See, e.g., Isa. 53.

<sup>29</sup>The Greek expression *tous pantas* emphasizes the collective unity of the race.

<sup>30</sup>Paul says essentially the same thing in Gal. 3:22, but in Gal. the Bible, as the expression of God's will, declares our being imprisoned (Gk. *sunekleisen*) due to sin. It emphasizes promise, faith, and believing, rather than mercy, but the promise "given through faith in Jesus Christ" refers to receiving life and righteousness (v. 22), i.e., salvation.

<sup>31</sup>Gk. *chrēstotēs*, "goodness," "kindness," "generosity."

<sup>32</sup>Gk. *philanthrōpia*, "lovingkindness for humankind;" "kindhearted benevolence."



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to bestowing favor in redeeming one from enemies (2 Rings 13:23; Ps. 6:2,7) or in appeals for the forgiveness of sin (Pss. 41:4; 5 1:1). Isaiah says that the Lord longs to be gracious to His people (Isa. 30:18), but personal salvation is not in view in any of these instances. The noun **chen** appears chiefly in the phrase "to find favor in someone's eyes" (of men: Gen. 30:27; 1 Sam. 20:29; of God: Exod. 34:9; 2 Sam. 15:25). **Che-sedh** always contains an element of loyalty to covenants and promises expressed spontaneously in acts of mercy and love. In the Old Testament the emphasis is on favor shown to the covenant people, though the nations are also **included**.<sup>33</sup>

In the New Testament, "grace," as the undeserved gift by which people are saved, appears primarily in Paul's **writings**.<sup>34</sup> It is "a central concept that most clearly expresses his understanding of the salvation event ... showing free unmerited grace. The element of **freedom** ... is constitutive." Paul emphasizes God's action, not His nature. "He does not speak of the gracious God; he speaks of the grace that is **actualised** (sic) in the cross of **Christ**."<sup>35</sup> In Ephesians 1:7 Paul says, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace," for "it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:5,8).

## GOD'S LOVE

Without minimizing His patience, mercy, and grace, the Bible most frequently associates God's desire to save us with His love. In the **Old Testament the primary focus is on covenantal love, as in Deuteronomy 7:**

**The LORD did not set his affection [Heb. *chasdaq*] on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples. ... But it was because the LORD loved [Heb. *'abev*] you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he ... redeemed you from the land of slavery. ... If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love [Heb. *chesedh*] with you, as he swore to your forefathers. He will love [Heb. *'abev*] you and bless you (w. 7-8,12-13).**

<sup>33</sup>See Jer. 9:24. *The verse stands in a passage that is universal in scope, i.e., w. 23-26.*

<sup>34</sup>For a notable exception, see Acts 15:11.

<sup>35</sup>Hans Conzelmann, "Charis," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 393-94. Its freeness reflects the "element of spontaneous freedom" found in *chesedh*. See Gal. 2:21.

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In a chapter of covenantal redemption the Lord says, "I have loved [Heb. *'abev*] you with an everlasting love [Heb. *'abavab*]; I have drawn you with loving-kindness [Heb. *che-sedh*]" (Jer. 31:3). In spite of Israel's backsliding and idolatry, God loved with an everlasting love.

The New Testament uses the words **agapaō or agapē** to refer to God's saving love. In prebiblical Greek the word had little power or strength. In the New Testament, however, its power and warmth are evident. "God is **agapē**" (1 John 4: 16); **therefore "he gave his one and only Son" (John 3: 16) to save humankind.** God has demonstrated His unmerited love in that while 'we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8). The New Testament gives ample testimony to the fact that God's love impelled Him to save lost humankind. Therefore, all four of these attributes of God—patience, mercy, grace, and **love—demonstrate** His goodness in providing for our **redemption**.<sup>36</sup>

If the Bible teaches that God's goodness moved Him to save lost humankind, it also teaches that nothing external to himself compelled Him to do so. Redemption finds its source in His free and unfettered love and will. In Deuteronomy 7:7-8 Moses points this out when he says that the Lord did not choose Israel because of who they were, but because He loved them and was faithful to His promise. Gods own character (i.e., His love **and faithfulness**) **was expressed in choosing and redeeming them even though they were stiff-necked (Deut. 9:6; 10:16).**<sup>37</sup>

In Galatians 1:4 Paul says that Christ "gave **himself for** our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." "On the Day of Pentecost Peter preached that Jesus was handed over to death "by God's set purpose and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23). Although we must not compromise the infinitely impelling power of divine love, we may not, on the other hand, compromise His sovereignty.

The New Testament preserves both in that it offers no theory of the Atonement, though it does give "several indications of the principle on which atonement is **effected**."<sup>38</sup> In spite of the nontheoretical approach of the New Testament,

<sup>36</sup>One should notice the frequency with which the Old Testament brings together in God all four of these characteristics. See Exod. 34:6; Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; and Jon. 4:2. See also Rom. 2:4 and Eph. 2:4-5,7.

<sup>37</sup>See also Deut. 4:37 and 10:15.

<sup>38</sup>Leon Morris, "Atonement" in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 97.

through the years church theologians have advanced several **theories**.<sup>39</sup> As it often happens when there are several theories to explain a biblical truth, each may contain a kernel of that truth.

## THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT

## THE MORAL-INFLUENCE THEORY

The moral-influence theory (also called the love-of-God theory or exemplarism) is generally attributed to Peter **Abe-lard**.<sup>40</sup> In stressing God's love he rejected any idea that there was in God that which required satisfaction. God did not demand payment for sin, but in love He graciously forgave. In the Incarnation and the Cross we see a demonstration of God's overwhelming love. This vision moves us to gratitude and love and therefore incites repentance, faith, and a desire to change our behavior. The moral-influence theory sees no atoning purpose or effect in the Cross.

We should not reject the theory out-of-hand. It contains truth. Don't examples of bravery and kindness inspire us to change and to be brave and kind? One cannot look at the Cross and not be inspired. In singing the well-known hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," we give expression to this theory.

But though the theory correctly emphasizes God's love, it is woefully inadequate in explaining **all** the Bible says about the reason for the Cross. It fails to take fully into account God's holiness and righteousness as well as biblical statements to the effect that Christ's death accomplished a work of expiation, if not propitiation (Rom. 3:25–26; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2). It also does not demonstrate that a mere stirring of the emotions will lead to repentance. It gives no satisfactory explanation of how the Old Testament saints came to be saved. Alister McGrath says, "Perhaps one of the most serious **difficulties** . . . is the utter ambiguity of the cross. If the sole insight to be gained from the cross is that God loves us, why should he go about revealing it in so ambiguous a **manner**?"<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup>That it happened becomes understandable when we realize that none of the early creeds (Nicea, A.D. 325; Constantinople, A.D. 381; Chalcedon, A.D. 451) formulated a theory of the Atonement. They were content simply to state that on the cross Christ effected salvation; they did not argue how.

<sup>40</sup>A French intellectual: philosopher, teacher, and theologian (1079–1142).

<sup>41</sup>Alister E. McGrath, *The Mystery of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 100.

If, in the Cross, Christ did nothing more than influence us, then His death is merely a performance for effect. The Bible asserts much more.

## THE RANSOM THEORY

The theory that emphasizes Christ's victory over Satan is sometimes called the ransom theory, or the devil-ransom or dramatic theory. Because of our sin we are under Satan's domination. But because God loves us, He offered His Son to the devil as a ransom price to set us free. The evil one was more than glad to make the exchange, but he didn't know that he could not keep Christ in Hades, and with the Resurrection he lost both the ransom and his original prisoners. That this transaction involved God in deception, because He surely knew the outcome, did not trouble the church fathers. To them it merely meant that God was wiser and stronger than Satan. The humanity of Jesus was the bait that concealed the hook of His deity, and the devil took it.<sup>42</sup> The fault was his, not God's.

After Anselm this view disappeared, but in recent years a Swedish theologian, Gustaf Aulen (1879–1978), revived the positive aspects of the theory in his classic work *Christus Victor*. He emphasized the biblical truth that the death of Christ did defeat the devil (Heb. 2:14; Col. 2:15; Rev. 5:5). Death and hell have been conquered (1 Cor. 15:54–57; Rev. 1:18). The seed of the woman has crushed the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). Seeing the Atonement as the victory over all the forces of evil must always be a vital part of our victorious proclamation of the gospel.<sup>43</sup> We must not discard that truth while rejecting the idea that God cunningly deceived Satan into his defeat.

<sup>42</sup>The idea of Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330–ca. 395). For a very brief summary of the historical background of the various theories, see the article "Atonement," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, Everett F. Harrison, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 71–75. For a fuller treatment of the first five centuries, see J. N. D. Kelley, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), 375–400.

<sup>43</sup>Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor*, trans. A. G. Hebert (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1969). See Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, 363, n.30, for a brief comment on teaching found among some **Pentecostals** that Christ's victory was won in Hades and not on the cross. See also D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 116–33.

**Anselm (1033–1109),**<sup>44</sup> propounded a theory that gave shape to nearly all Catholic and Protestant thought on the subject down to the present. In part aimed at Jews of his day who denied a true Incarnation, he wrote his treatise *Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Man)*. In it he offered one of the first well thought-out theories of the Atonement, usually called the satisfaction theory.<sup>45</sup> He said that in their sinning, people insult the honor of the sovereign, infinite God. Insult to a sovereign head cannot go unpunished and demands satisfaction. But how could that be achieved by us if the sovereign head is the **infinite** God? At the same time, God's love pleads for the sinner. How shall the apparent conflict in God find resolution? We commit the sin and therefore must render the satisfaction. But because only God could do so, and we alone must do so, only a God-man could satisfy the insult to God's honor and pay the infinite price for forgiveness.

The satisfaction theory has much to commend it. It focuses on what God requires in the Atonement and not on Satan. It takes a much more profound view of the seriousness of sin than do the moral-influence and ransom theories. It proposes a theory of satisfaction, an idea that is a more adequate explanation of the biblical materials.

But the satisfaction theory has weaknesses as well. God becomes a feudal lord whose vassals have gravely dishonored Him, and He cannot let that go unpunished **if He** is to preserve His position. What Anselm failed to take into account, however, is the possibility that a sovereign could be merciful without jeopardizing his superior station. The theory seems to imply a real conflict between the attributes of God, which the Bible disallows. Then it also takes on a quantitative dimension: Since sins are virtually infinite in number and infinite in nature—because they are against an infinite God, the sacrifice must also be quantitatively and qualitatively infinite. Although this explanation should not be totally rejected, the biblical emphasis is not on a commercial transaction but on the action of a loving and gracious God. We are not simply

<sup>44</sup>A medieval theologian and Archbishop of Canterbury (1033–1109).

<sup>45</sup>Sometimes called the commercial theory because it makes the sacrifice of Christ a transaction to satisfy God's honor. See Henry C. Thiessen *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), 319.

<sup>46</sup>We must recall that Anselm lived in the days of knighthood and chivalry, a time when one's honor was prized above all else.

bystanders who receive indirect benefits from a transaction that takes place between God and His Son. We are the purpose of it all. Although Anselm's theory has weaknesses, they do not negate its underlying thrust, that is, an Atonement that renders satisfaction.

#### THE GOVERNMENTAL THEORY

The governmental theory owes its origin to Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), a Dutch jurist, statesman, and theologian. He viewed God as a Lawgiver who both enacts and sustains law in the universe. Law is the result of God's will, and He is free to "alter or even abrogate it." The Law states unequivocally: "The soul that sins shall die." Strict justice requires the eternal death of sinners.

How could God maintain respect for the Law and at the same time show clemency to sinners? Simply forgiving them, which He could have done, would fail to uphold the Law. So He did it, not by appeasing a principle of judicial wrath in His nature, but by setting forth the death of Christ as "a public example of the depth of sin and the lengths to which God would go to uphold the moral order of the **universe**."<sup>47</sup> The **effects** of His death do not bear on us directly, only secondarily, in that Christ did not die in our place but only in our behalf. The primary focus was not saving sinners but upholding the Law. In the Cross, God showed He can abominate lawlessness and at the same time maintain the Law and forgive the lawless.

Although the governmental theory contains a kernel of truth in that "the penalty inflicted on Christ is also instrumental in securing the interests of divine **government**,"<sup>48</sup> it does not express the heart of biblical teaching, and in this we **find** the primary objection. It does a **disservice** to the many Scripture passages which, if taken at face value, indicate a substitutionary motif in Christ's death (e.g., Matt. 20:28; 26:28; John 10:14–15; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 5:25). The theory fails to explain the reason for choosing a sinless person to demonstrate God's desire to uphold the Law. Why not put to death the worst of all sinners? Why Christ and not Barabbas? That would surely be a clearer example of the depth to which God felt the need to show how detestable lawlessness was

<sup>47</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 388. Leon Morris, "Theories of the Atonement" in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 102.

<sup>48</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 389.

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to Him. In addition, the theory does not take fully into account **the** depravity of the race. Like the moral-influence theory it assumes that a mere example will be **sufficient** to enable us to carry on a law-abiding way of living. Nothing could be further from biblical truth.

## THE PENAL-SUBSTITUTION THEORY

Reflecting the basic thought of the Reformers, **evangelicalism affirms** the idea of penal substitution to explain the meaning of Christ's death. It states that Christ bore in our place the full penalty of sin that was due us. That is, His death was vicarious, totally for others. This means that He suffered not merely for our benefit or **advantage**<sup>49</sup>, but in our place, in our stead (Gk. *anti*, "instead of," as in Mark 10:45 and 2 Cor. 5:14).

The New Testament never uses the expression "penal substitution," but of all the various theories it appears to represent most adequately the teachings of the Bible. It takes the Bible seriously in its depictions of God's holiness and righteousness as they find expression in His judicial wrath. It takes fully into account what the Bible says about our depravity and consequent inability to save ourselves. It takes literally those statements that say typologically (in the sacrificial system), prophetically (in direct announcement), and historically (in the New Testament record) that Christ "took our place."<sup>50</sup>

We must express the view carefully, for not all agree with the penal-substitution theory. Some objections must be answered, such as the following.

1. Since sin is not something external, can it be transferred from one person to another? To do so would, in fact, be **immoral**.<sup>51</sup> Seeing it, however, not as a mechanical transfer

<sup>49</sup>The Greek preposition *hyper*, which may be the meaning in Gal. 2:20 and Eph. 5:25, but cannot be the meaning in John 11:50; 2 Cor. 5:15; and Gal. 3:13.

<sup>50</sup>For the sacrificial system see Lev. 4:1 through 6:7; 6:24–30; 7:1–6; 8:14–17; and 10:3–20. Giving to God the firstborn of all clean animals was "in place of" a firstborn son (Exod. 13:1–16). The scapegoat was a substitute bearer of sins (Lev. 16:20–22). See Heb. 2:17; 7:27; 9:15, 28; and 10:10 for the idea of substitution in sacrifices. See, e.g. of direct announcement, Isa. 53:4–6, 8, 12. For the New Testament record, see Mark 10:45; John 3:17; 10:11, 15; Rom. 3:21–26; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:24; etc. The references are many and varied.

<sup>51</sup>This reflects Pelagianism in its doctrine of original sin.

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of sins but as Christ's identification with us, a sinful race, lessens the intensity of the objection. Other than in sinning, Christ became one with us. Could it, then, also be said that God's transferring to us the righteousness of Christ is **immoral**? We need to understand, as well, that God himself **is** the sacrifice. In Jesus, God assumed the guilt and bore the **penalty**.<sup>52</sup>

2. The penal-substitution theory implies a conflict in the Godhead. Christ becomes a loving Savior who must tear forgiveness from the closed fist of a wrathful Father. God's righteousness stands above His love. The fact remains, however, that the Scriptures clearly exclude this two-pronged objection. The Father loved the world so much that He sent the Son. John says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). John 3:36 says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." Love and wrath appear together in relationship to God's sending Jesus. One is not above the other.

3. The penal-substitution theory minimizes God's free grace in implying He would not and, in fact, could not forgive unless appeased by a sacrifice. Although the objection touches a truth, it fails in that it does not recognize that Christ's atoning work **is** God's forgiveness. In it God shows that He **is** forgiving and **does** forgive. Those who object to the theory of penal substitution need to recognize the implications of such a decision. Who bears the penalty for sin, Christ or us? We cannot have it both ways. Is Christianity a redemptive religion? If not, where does our hope lie? If so, substitution is **implicit**.<sup>53</sup>

## ASPECTS OF CHRIST'S SAVING WORK

## SACRIFICE

Although some ideas have already been covered, we need to look more closely at several aspects of Christ's saving work. A number of biblical words characterize it. No one reading the Scriptures perceptively can escape the fact that sacrifice

<sup>52</sup>We must, of course, not construe this to imply any form of patrispianism, the idea that the Father suffered and died on the cross. See modalistic monarchianism or Sabellianism, chap. 3, pp. 161–62.

<sup>53</sup>See Thielecke, *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 2, 405–6.

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stands at the heart of redemption, both in the Old and New Testaments. The imagery of a lamb or a kid slain as part of the saving, redeeming drama goes back to the Passover (Exod. 12: 1-13). God **would** see the sprinkled blood and "pass over" those whom the blood shielded. When the Old Testament believer placed his hands on the sacrifice it conveyed more than identification, (i.e., this is "my" sacrifice); it was a sacrificial substitute (i.e., this I sacrifice in my place).

Although we must not **press the** comparisons too far, this imagery is clearly transferred to Christ in the New Testament.\* John the Baptist introduced Him by announcing, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). In Acts 8, Philip applies **Isaiah's prophecy** that the Servant would be "led like a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7) to "the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:35). Paul refers to Christ as "our Passover lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7). Peter says that we were redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet. 1:19). Even those in the heavenlies praised and worshiped the Lion of the tribe of Judah as the slain Lamb (Rev. 5). Although some may cringe at the "blood and gore" associated with **sacrifice**, to remove it rips the heart out of the Bible.

Closely related to the concept of sacrifice are the terms "propitiation" and "expiation," which seek to answer the question, What **effect** does Christ's sacrifice have? In the Old Testament these words reflect the word group of **kipper** and in the New that of **hilaskomai**. Both word groups mean "to appease," "pacify," or "conciliate" (i.e., to propitiate), and "to cover over with a price" or "atone for" (so as to remove sin or offense **from** one's presence; i.e., to expiate). At times the decision to choose one meaning over the other relates more to a theological position than to basic word meaning. For example, one may make a theological decision concerning what the Bible means when it speaks of God's wrath or anger. Does it require appeasing?

Colin Brown refers to a "broad segment of biblical scholars who maintain that sacrifice in the Bible is concerned with expiation rather than propitiation." G. C. Berkouwer refers to Adolph Harnack's statement that orthodoxy confers on God the "horrible privilege" of not being in "a position to

\*See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* 377. For example, some female animals were part of the sacrificial ritual, even when for sin (Lev. 4:28,32). The New Testament does not go into great detail concerning the Levitical sacrifices. It stresses the idea of sacrifice, not the specific kinds.

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forgive out of love." Leon Morris expresses the general consensus of **evangelicals** in saying, "The consistent Bible view is that the sin of man has incurred the wrath of God. That wrath is averted by Christ's atoning offering. From this standpoint his saving work is properly called propitiation." Neither the **Septuagint** nor the New Testament emptied the force of **hilaskomai** as to its meaning of **propitiation**.<sup>55</sup>

The Bible abandons the crudeness often associated with the word in pagan ritual. The Lord is not a malevolent and capricious deity whose nature remains so inscrutable that one never knows how He will act. But His wrath is real. However, the Bible teaches that God in His love, mercy, and **faithfulness** to His promises provided the means by which to satisfy His wrath. In the case of New Testament teaching, God not only provided the means, He also became the means. First John 4:10 says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice [Gk. **hilasmos**] for our sins."<sup>56</sup>

All the lexicons show that **kipper** and **hilaskomai** mean "propitiate" and "expiate." The difference lies in how one **views their** meaning in the biblical materials that deal with

<sup>55</sup>In the Old Testament, references to the wrath of God appear almost six hundred times. In the New Testament, they are less frequent but are still present.

<sup>56</sup>"Hilaskomai," New *International Dictionary*, vol. 3, 145-76. See C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 82-95, and Buschel "hilaskomai," *Theological Dictionary*, vol. 3, 310-23 for examples of this view. J. Rodman Williams says, "Although 'propitiation' conveys an important element of truth, it is less satisfactory [than expiation]" (Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, 361, note 20). See Roger Nicole, "C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 17:117-157, and Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956), chaps. 4-5, for a criticism of Dodd. See also H. C. Hahn, "Anger, Wrath" in New *International Dictionary*, vol. 1, 105-13.

G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 275-76.

Morris, "Propitiation," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 888.

**Hilasmos** and its cognates appear only eight times in the New Testament, but in the Septuagint they occur well over two hundred times, most often related to **kipper**, "cover over with a price," "pacify," or "propitiate." In the Septuagint, **exhilaskomai** and **hilasmos** are most frequent.

<sup>56</sup>The NIV translates **hilaskomai** and related forms as "atoning sacrifice," "make atonement" (Heb. 2:17), "atonement cover" (Heb. 9:5), and "sacrifice of atonement" (Rom. 3:25). It uses neither "propitiation" nor "expiation" anywhere in the translation. One can understand the reason for doing so: the terms have no common usage in today's English.

atonement. If one accepts what the Bible says about God's wrath, a possible solution presents itself. We could see the words as having a vertical and horizontal reference. When the context focuses on the Atonement in relation to God, the words speak of propitiation. But they mean expiation when the focus is on us and our sin. We do not choose either/or but both/and. The historical and literary context determines the appropriate **meaning**.<sup>57</sup>

The question may arise, If He bore the penalty of our guilt by taking the wrath of God on himself and covering our sin, did He suffer the exact same consequences and punishment in kind and degree that all for whom He died would cumulatively suffer? After all, He was only one; we are many. As with so many such questions there can be no final answer. The Bible makes no such attempt. One should, however, remember that in the Cross we do not deal with a mechanical event or commercial transaction. The work of salvation moves on a spiritual plane, and no tidy analogies exist to explain it all.

We need to keep in mind, first, that suffering by its very nature is not subject to mathematical calculation or to being weighed on a scale. In a sense, to suffer the severest broken arm possible is to suffer them all. To die one excruciating and agonizing death is to die all of them. Second, we have to recall the character and nature of the person suffering. Christ was perfect in holiness and therefore had no sense of personal blame or remorse, as we would have if we knew we were suffering justly for our sins. There is something heroic in the stinging rebuke the thief on the cross hurled at his companion in crime. " 'Don't you fear God, ... since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong' " (Luke 23:40-41). Christ's perfection did not detract from His suffering but may, in fact, have intensified it, because He knew His was undeserved. His prayer that He would not have to "drink the cup" was no ploy. He knew the suffering

<sup>57</sup>Not all will be satisfied with such a simple solution, of course. But it appears reasonable. Note 2 Kings 24:3-4; Ps. 78:38; and Rom. 3:25 for examples of God's anger or punishment joined with forgiveness or atoning sacrifice.

that lay before Him. That He suffered as God certainly has a bearing on the **question**.<sup>58</sup>

#### RECONCILIATION

Unlike some other biblical or theological terms, "**reconciliation**" appears as part of our common vocabulary. It is a term drawn from the social realm. Broken relationships of any kind cry out for reconciling. The New Testament is clear in its teaching that the saving work of Christ is a reconciling work. By His death He has removed all barriers between God and us. The word group the New Testament uses (Gk. *al-la.&*) occurs rarely in the Septuagint and uncommonly in the New, even in a religious **sense**.<sup>59</sup> The basic verb means "to change," "to cause one thing to cease and another to take its place." The New Testament uses it six times with no reference to the doctrine of reconciliation (e.g., Acts 6:14; 1 Cor. 15:51-52). Paul alone employs the word group with religious connotations. The verb *katallassō* and the noun *katallagē* properly convey the notion of "to exchange" or "to reconcile," as one would reconcile books in accounting practices. In the New Testament the application is primarily to God and us. The reconciling work of Christ restores us to God's favor because "the books have been balanced."

<sup>58</sup>Note the suffering in the messianic Pss. 22 and 69 and in the prophecy about the Servant in Isa. 53. For us who are Trinitarian, any hesitation to affirm that "God died" on the cross is misdirected. Of course, God cannot die. But Jesus was and is the God-Man, perfect God and perfect Man. God cannot be born either, but He was in Jesus. The best Greek texts of Acts 20:28 support the reading, "Be shepherds of the Assembly of God, which He [God] bought with his own blood." Some translate the phrase *dia tou haimatos tou idiou* as "through the blood of His own," i.e., "His own Son." A study of the use of the adjective *idios* will show that the absolute use in the singular is rare, appearing at most four times if we exclude Acts 20:28 (i.e., John 15:19; Acts 4:32; Rom. 3:30; and possibly 1 Cor. 12:11). In each instance, the context makes explicitly clear what *idios* refers to. Heb. 9:12 and 13:12 have a different order, *dia tou idiou haimatos*, but that simply reflects a common position of the adjective when the writer wishes to stress the noun rather than the adjective. The difference does not demonstrate that the translation in Acts 20:28 must be "through the blood of his own Son."

<sup>59</sup>The word "reconcile" does not occur in any form in the NIV of the Old Testament. Its appearance in the KJV generally translates Heb. words having to do with "making atonement" (e.g., the *kipper* group, cf. Lev. 6:30 and 8:15). The NIV New Testament has sixteen uses, twelve of which have a religious sense. The double compound verb, *apokatallassō*, does not appear in any Greek literature before Paul. He coined it. See Eph. 2:16 and Col. 1:20,22.

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**The** major relevant passages are Romans 5:9–11 and 2 Corinthians 5: 16–21. In Romans, Paul places the emphasis on the assurance we can have regarding our salvation. In two “how much more” statements he asserts that Christ’s work will save us from God’s wrath (Rom. 5:9) and that even when we were enemies (Col. 1:21–22) His death reconciled us to God; therefore, His being alive assures our salvation (Rom. 5:10). We can rejoice in our reconciliation to God through Christ (5:11). If the stress in Romans is on what God did “for us” in Christ, in 2 Corinthians it is on God as the prime mover in reconciliation (cf. Col. 1:19–20).<sup>60</sup> Our being a new creation comes from God “who reconciled us to **himself through Christ**” (2 Cor. 5:18) and who “was reconciling the world to himself-in Christ” (5:19). **These verses** emphasize what may be called active reconciliation, i.e., for reconciliation to take place the offended party takes the primary role. Unless the offended person shows a willingness to receive the offender, no reconciliation can take place.

Observe how reconciliation takes place in human relationships, say between husband and wife. If I were to sin against my wife, resulting in a break in our relationship, even if I were to take the initiative and earnestly appeal for reconciliation-with candy and flowers and on my knees **begging**—she must **first** forgive me in her heart for restoration to occur. She must take the initiative in that her attitude is the crucial factor. Through Christ, God assures us He has taken the initiative. He has already forgiven. Now we must respond and accept the fact that God has torn from top to bottom the veil separating us **from** Him and walk boldly into His forgiving presence. That is our part, accepting what God has done through Christ.<sup>61</sup> Unless both actions take place reconciliation will never happen.

<sup>60</sup>The more literal translation of the first clause of 2 Cor. 5:19 is “God was in Christ [the] world reconciling to himself” (*theos ên en Christō kosmon katallassōn beautō*). Does the phrase “in Christ” point back to *ên*, “was,” or forward to *katallassōn*, “reconciling”? In other words, does it affirm Christ’s deity (i.e., “God was in Christ”) or refer to the work God accomplished in Christ (i.e., “in Christ He was reconciling the world”) The position may appear to favor the former, but the latter is more in keeping with the context (i.e., the work of Christ is in view, not His character). See the NIV and the NRS.

<sup>61</sup>Except for 2 Cor. 5:19, the tense in each use is the aorist, expressing the decisiveness of God’s work: It is done! Our response must be just as decisive: Be reconciled! (5:20).

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## REDEMPTION

**The** Bible also uses the metaphor of ransom or **redemption**<sup>62</sup> to describe the saving work of Christ. The motif appears much more frequently in the Old Testament than in the New. A large number of uses in the Old Testament refer to the rites of “redemption” in relation to persons or property (cf. Lev. 25; 27; Ruth 3 **through 4, which use the Hebrew term *ga’al***). The “kinsman redeemer” functions as a *go’el*. **Yahweh himself is the Redeemer (Heb. *go’el*) of His people (Isa. 41:14; 43:14), and they are the redeemed (Heb. *ge’ulim*, Isa. 35:9; 62:12).**<sup>63</sup> The Lord made provision to redeem (Heb. *padbab*) the firstborn sons (Exod. 13:13–15). He has redeemed Israel **from** Egypt (Exod. 6:6; Deut. 7:8; 13:5) and **will** redeem them from exile (Jer. 31:11). At **times God redeems** an individual (Pss. 49:15; 71:23), **or an individual prays that God will redeem him (Pss. 26:11; 69:18)**; however, God’s redeeming work is primarily national in scope. In a **few** places redemption clearly relates to moral concerns. Psalm 130:8 says, “He **himself will** redeem Israel from all their sins.” Isaiah says that only the “redeemed,” the “ransomed,” will walk on the highway called “the Way of Holiness” (35:8–10). He says, further, that the “Daughter of Zion” will be called “the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD” (62:11–12).

In the **New** Testament, Jesus is both the “Ransomer” and the “ransom”; lost sinners are the “ransomed.” He declares that He has come “to give his life as a ransom [Gk. *Zutron*] for many” (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). It was a “deliverance [Gk. *apolutrōsis*] effected through the death of Christ from the retributive wrath of a holy God and the merited penalty of **sin**.”<sup>64</sup> Paul joins our justification and the forgiveness of sins with the redemption Christ provided (Rom. 3:24; Col. 1:14, both *apolutrōsis*). He says that Christ “has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and

<sup>62</sup>See above on Anselm’s theory of the Atonement. The idea calls for amplification here. When God does the ransoming the Bible never puts the emphasis on the price paid but on the result (i.e., deliverance and freedom).

<sup>63</sup>The context of these references in Isaiah shows that he looks beyond the immediate future to the end times.

<sup>64</sup>Here the “many” stands in contrast with the death of the “one” person, Jesus, and therefore includes all, not merely some. See R. W. Lyon, “Ransom,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 908, and Pincock, *The Grace of God*, 59–60 and 78. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 65.



redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). He says also that Christ "gave himself as a ransom [Gk. *antilutron*] for all men" (1 Tim. 2:6). The New Testament clearly shows that the redemption He provided was through His blood (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:12; 1 Pet. 1:18–19; Rev. 5:9), for the blood of bulls and goats could not **take** away sins (Heb. 10:4). Christ bought us (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gk. *agorazō*) back for God, and the purchase price was His blood (Rev. 5:9).

Since the words imply a deliverance from a state of bondage by payment of a price, from what have we been set free? The contemplation of these things should cause great joy! Christ has delivered us from the righteous judgment of God which we justly deserved because of our sins (Rom. 3:24–25). He has redeemed us from the inevitable consequences of breaking God's law, which subjected us to God's wrath. Even though we do not do everything the Law requires we no longer stand under a curse. Christ took that on himself (Gal. 3:10–13). His redemption secured the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7) and set us free from them (Heb. 9:15). By giving himself for us, He redeemed "us from all wickedness [Gk. *anomia*]" (Titus 2:14), but not to use our "freedom to indulge the sinful nature" (Gal. 5:13) or "as a cover-up for evil" (1 Pet. 2:16). (*Anomia* is the same word Paul uses in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 in referring to "the man of lawlessness.") Christ's purpose in redeeming us is "to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14).

Peter says that "you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers" (1 Pet. 1:18). We cannot be certain whom he refers to by "forefathers." Is it to pagans or to Jews? Or to both? Probably to both in that the New Testament regarded pagan ways as futile (Acts 14:15; Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:17) and also saw a kind of futility in the external practices of the Jewish religion (Acts 15:10; Gal. 2:16; 5:1; Heb. 9:10, 25–26; 10:3–4). There will also be a final redemption from the groaning and pain of this present age when the resurrection takes place and we see the result of our being adopted as children of God through Christ's redeeming work (Rom. 8:22–23).

Evangelicals believe the New Testament teaches that Christ paid the full ransom price to set us free. His is "the" objective work of atonement, the benefits of which, when applied to us, leave nothing to be added by us. It is a final work and

cannot be repeated. It is a unique work and can never be imitated or **shared**.<sup>65</sup>

#### THE EXTENT OF THE ATONING WORK OF CHRIST

A significant difference of opinion exists among Christians regarding the extent of Christ's atoning work. For whom did He die? Evangelicals as a whole have rejected the doctrine of absolute universalism (i.e., divine love will not permit any human being, and perhaps not even the devil and fallen angels, to remain separated from it forever). Universalism posits that Christ's saving work embraced absolutely everyone. In addition to passages that show God's nature of infinite love and mercy, the key verse for universalism is Acts 3:21, where Peter says that Jesus "must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything." Some take the Greek expression *apokatastaseōs pantōn* ("restoration of all things")

<sup>65</sup>This differs from a basic idea in Roman Catholic theology, i.e., that the Atonement covers original sin and the eternal penalty of mortal postbaptismal sins. Catholicism teaches that the penalty for temporal (venial) sins must be satisfied by us in this world through penance and in the coming world in purgatory. See chap. 18, p. 612, for a discussion of purgatory.

If these things are so, how do we explain Col. 1:24? There Paul says, "Now I rejoice in what was suffered [Gk. *pathēmasin*] for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions [Gk. *ta bustērēmata tōn thlipseōn*], for the sake of his body, which is the Church." Paul appears to be saying there was something deficient in Christ's atoning sacrifice. Of course, a single verse cannot affect everything the New Testament has to say about Christ's unique and final work. How impossible to suppose Paul in any way intended to say the work of Christ was not sufficient (cf. Col. 2:11–15)! But what does he mean? The word he uses for "afflictions" (Gk. *thlipsis*, from *thlibō*, "to press hard," "crowd," "afflict") refers to the ordinary burdens of life in a fallen world and not to Christ's atoning sufferings. The New Testament chooses *paschō* or *pathēma* to refer to that idea (cf. Acts 17:3; Heb. 13:12; 1 Pet. 2:21, 23). The background of Paul's statement is the principle of our union with Christ. That union, by its very nature, implies suffering. Jesus said, "All men will hate you because of me" (Mark 13:13). In Acts 9:4 He says, "'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'" (See also Matt. 10:25; John 15:18–21; Acts 9:4–5; Rom. 6:6; 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:10; 4:10; Phil. 3:10; etc.) To persecute the Church is to persecute Jesus; in this way, He enters into the afflictions the Church experienced. Paul is not alone, however, in "making up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." The whole Church, in solidarity with each other and in union with its Head, shares in that. Christ's "personal sufferings are over, but His sufferings in His people continue." See Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976–92), 190.

<sup>66</sup>Such teaching goes back to Greek fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. Origen believed this to be a possibility.



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to be absolute in intent, rather than simply “all things promised. . . **through** His holy prophets.” Although the Scriptures do refer to a future restoration (Rom. **8:18–25**; 1 Cor. **15:24–26**; 2 Pet. **3:13**), in light of all the Bible’s teaching on the eternal destiny of both human beings and angels, one cannot use this verse to support **universalism**.<sup>67</sup> To do so would do exegetical violence to what the Bible has to say in this regard.

Among **evangelicals** the difference lies in the choice between particularism, or limited atonement (i.e., Christ died only for those whom God has sovereignly elected), and qualified universalism, or unlimited atonement (i.e., Christ died for everyone, but His saving work is effected only in those who repent and believe). That a clear-cut **difference** of opinion exists among equally devout, Bible-believing people should steer us away from the extreme dogmatizing we have seen in the past and do see yet today. Tied to a particular doctrine of election, both views find their basis in the Bible and logic. Both agree that the issue is not one of application. Not all will be saved. Both agree that directly or indirectly all people receive benefits from the atoning work of Christ. The point of disagreement has to do with the divine ‘intent. Was it to make salvation possible for all, or for only the elect, and thereby secure and guarantee their eternal salvation?

Particularists look to passages that say Christ died for the sheep (John 10: **11,15**), for the Church (Eph. **5:25**; Acts **20:28**), or for “many” (Mark **10:45**). They also cite numerous passages which, in context, clearly associate “believers” with Christ’s atoning work (John **17:9**; Gal. **1:4**; **3:13**; 2 Tim. **1:9**; Titus **2:3**; 1 Pet. **2:24**). Particularists argue: (1) **If Christ** died for all, then God would be unjust if any perished for his or her own sins, since Christ took on himself the full penalty for the sins of all. God would not twice require the debt. (2) The doctrine of unlimited atonement logically leads to universalism because to think otherwise calls into question the efficacy of Christ’s work, which was for “all.” (3) Sound exegesis and hermeneutics make evident that universal language is not always absolute (cf. Luke **2:1**, NRS; John **12:32**; Rom. **5:18**; Col. **3: 11**).

Those who espouse qualified universalism argue: (1) It alone

<sup>67</sup>See Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 3, 453–56. He says, “At this point (even in a systematic theology) I can only express a personal conviction. In my view some theological truths and circumstances in this case the position of the lost cannot be the theme of theological statements but only of prayer” (456).

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makes sense of the sincere offer of the gospel to all people. Opponents reply that the warrant for preaching the gospel to all is the Great Commission. Since the Bible teaches election, and since we don’t know who the elect are (cf. Acts **18:10**—“I have many people in this city,” i.e., Corinth)—we must preach to all. But would it be a genuine offer from God who says, “Whosoever will,” when He knows that that is not really possible? (2) Prior to the rise of Calvinism, qualified universalism had been the majority opinion from the beginning of the Church. “Among the Reformers the doctrine is found in Luther, Melancthon, Bullinger, Latimer, Cranmer, Coverdale, and even Calvin in some of his commentaries. For example Calvin says regarding . . . Mark **14:24**, ‘which is shed for many: By the word “many” he [Mark] means not a part of the world only, but the whole human race.’ ”<sup>68</sup> (3) The charges that if an unlimited atonement were true God would be unjust and that universalism is the logical outcome cannot be sustained. We have to bear in mind that one must believe to be saved, even the elect. The application of Christ’s work is not automatic. Because a person chooses not to believe does not mean that Christ did not die for him or her, or that God’s character becomes suspect.

The crux of the defense, however, is that one cannot easily dismiss the obvious intent of the many universalistic passages. Millard Erickson says, “The hypothesis of universal atonement is able to account for a larger segment of the biblical witness with less distortion than is the hypothesis of limited **atonement**.”<sup>69</sup> For example, Hebrews **2:9** says that by the grace of God, Jesus tasted death for “everyone.” It is rather easy to argue that the context (**2:10–13**) shows the writer does not mean everyone absolutely, but the “many sons” Jesus brings to glory. But such a conclusion stretches exegetical credibility. Besides, in the context there is a universal thrust (**2:5–8,15**).<sup>70</sup> When the Bible says that “God so loved the world” (John **3:16**), or that Christ is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John **1:29**), or that He is “the Savior of the world” (1 John **4:14**), it means just that.

Certainly the Bible uses the word “world” in a qualitative

<sup>68</sup>Walter A. Elwell, “Extent of Atonement,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 99.

<sup>69</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 835.

<sup>70</sup>The reference to “Abraham’s descendants” (Heb. **2:16**) merely expresses the idea that Christ assumed human and not angelic nature. It does not support particularism in relation to Christ’s work.

sense, referring to the evil world system that Satan dominates. But Christ did not die for a system; He died for the people who are part of it. No place in the New Testament does “world” refer to the Church or to the elect. Paul says that Jesus “gave himself as a ransom for all men” (1 Tim. 2:6) and that God “wants all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4). In 1 John 2:1-2 we have an explicit separation between the believers and the world, and an affirmation that Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, “is the atoning sacrifice” (v. 2) for both. H. C. Thiessen reflects the thought of the Synod of Dort (1618–19) in saying, “We conclude that the atonement is unlimited in the sense that it is available for all; it is limited in that it is effective only for those who believe. It is available for all, but efficient only for the **elect**.”<sup>71</sup>

#### THE ORDER OF SALVATION

Because of His infinite goodness and justice God sent His one and only Son to the cross to bear the full penalty of sin, so that He might freely and justly forgive all who come to Him. How does this take place in a person’s life? Thinking about the application of Christ’s work to us leads to a consideration of what has been called the *ordo salutis* (“order of salvation”), a term dating from about 1737 attributed to Lutheran theologian Jakob Karpov, though the idea predates him. It asks the question, What is the logical (not the chronological) order in which we experience the process of going from a sinful state to one of full salvation? The Bible gives no order, though in embryo it can be found in Ephesians 1:11–14 and in Romans 8:28–30, where Paul lists foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification, each building on the prior idea.

Roman Catholicism has related the order to the sacraments, i.e., baptism, at which one experiences regeneration; **confirmation**, when one receives the Holy Spirit; the Eucharist, a participating in the physical presence of Christ; penance, the forgiveness of nonmortal sins, and extreme unction, when one receives assurance of entrance into God’s eternal kingdom.”

<sup>71</sup>See also Isa. 53:6; Matt. 11:28; Rom. 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; 1 Tim. 4:10; 2 Pet. 3:9. Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 242.

<sup>72</sup>Since Vatican II, Roman Catholics refer to extreme unction as “the anointing of the sick” and no longer limit it to the last rites.

Among Protestants the difference lies primarily in the Reformed and, in general, the Wesleyan approaches. The view one takes relates to one’s doctrine of depravity. Does it imply a total inability that necessitates a regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to enable one to repent and believe, i.e., the Reformed position? The order would then be election, **predestination**, foreknowledge, calling, regeneration, repentance, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. Or does it imply that, because we continue to bear the image of God even in our fallen state, we are able to respond to God’s drawing in repentance and faith? If this, the order is foreknowledge, election, predestination, calling, repentance, faith, regeneration, and the rest. The differences lie in the order of the first three, i.e., those that refer to God’s activity in eternity, and in the placement of regeneration in the order. The latter order is the position of this chapter.

#### ELECTION

That the Bible teaches a divine choosing, a divine election, is evident. The Old Testament says that God chose Abraham (Neh. 9:7), the people of Israel (Deut. 7:6; 14:2; Acts 13:17), David (1 Rings 11:34), Jerusalem (2 Rings 23:27), and the Servant (Isa. 42: 1; 43: 10). In the New Testament God’s choosing refers to angels (1 Tim. 5:21), Christ (Matt. 12:18; 1 Pet. 2:4,6), a remnant of Israel (Rom. 11:5), and believers, i.e., the elect, whether individually (Rom. 16:13; 2 John 1:1,13) or collectively (Rom. 8:33; 1 Pet. 2:9). Always the initiative is with God. He did not choose Israel because of their greatness (Deut. 7:7). Jesus tells His disciples, “ ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you’ ” (John 15:16).<sup>73</sup> Paul makes this very evident in Romans 9:6–24 in stating that God chose only the descendants of Isaac to be His children (w. 7–8), and that even before they were born He chose Jacob, not his twin, Esau, “in order that God’s purpose in election might stand” (v. 11).<sup>74</sup>

We need to note Paul’s emphases. One is that being a child of God depends on the free and sovereign expression of His mercy and not on anything we are or do. Paul emphasizes a

<sup>73</sup>That is, they were chosen for a particular ministry. As in the case of Israel, the choice was for a work, not for salvation. But that work could be done only as they remained in relation to Him.

<sup>74</sup>One should observe here that in neither case is personal salvation in view.

divine mercy that includes Gentiles as well as Jews (Rom. 9:24–26; 10:12). Calvinism sees this passage as affirming the doctrine that God made an arbitrary choice that does not take into account human response or participation. However, that is not the only possibility. Even in this whole section (Rom. 9 through 11), evidence of participation and responsibility appears (cf. vv. 9:30–33; 10:3–6, 9–11, 13–14, 16; 11:20, 22–23). Paul says, “God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden” (9: 18). He also says that Israel has experienced “a hardening in part” (11:25), but the context seems to relate this to their disobedience, obstinacy, and unbelief (10:2 1; 11:20). In addition, Paul states that the reason “God has bound all men over to disobedience” is “that he may have mercy on them all” (11:32). Therefore, in seeing all that Paul stresses we are not forced to make only one conclusion, i.e., unconditional election.<sup>75</sup>

In any discussion of election we must always begin with Jesus. Any theological conclusion that has no reference to the heart and teaching of the Savior must be suspect. His nature reflects the God who elects, and in **Jesus we** find no particularism. In Him we find love. Therefore, it is significant that in four places Paul joins love with election or predestination. “We know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen [Gk. *eklogēn*] **you**” (1 Thess. 1:4). “As God’s chosen people [Gk. *eklektoi*],<sup>76</sup> holy and dearly loved. . .” (Col. 3: 12)—in this context, loved by God. “For he chose [Gk. *exelexato*] **us** in him before the creation of the world. . . In love he

<sup>75</sup>The terms “elect” (verb or noun) and “election” always refer to those who are God’s people, whether Israel (Rom. 11:28) or the Church (1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1: 10). They are not merely potentially God’s people, they are. So the elect are the elected ones, i.e., believers. But the biblical teaching on election does not clearly demonstrate or prove the doctrine of unconditional election. Based on strong statements regarding the decrees of God (see various Calvinist theologians, e.g., Berkhof, **Buswell**, **Hodge**) the doctrine faces two difficulties. (1) It does not have a satisfactory idea of human freedom. Is freedom merely the ability to act according to one’s nature or desires? Or does true freedom imply the real ability to choose between opposites? (2) If election is unconditional, how does one avoid the corollary doctrine of double predestination? If God unconditionally elected some, by that very decision **He** actively consigned the rest to damnation. To refer to this divine action as “preterition” (i.e., God’s passing over the nonelect) makes the term a theological euphemism for double predestination.

<sup>76</sup>The emphasis is on an elect Body. See Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* (Springfield, Mo.: Westcott Publishers, 1970).

predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will” (Eph. 1:4–5). The last phrase is better translated “according to the good pleasure [Gk. *eudokia*] of his will” (NRS). Although divine intent is not absent from this word in the Greek, it has as well a sense of warmth not evident in *thelō* or *boulomai*. **The** verb form appears in Matthew 3:17, where the Father says, “ ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased [Gk. *eudokēsa*].’ ”

Finally, Paul says, “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose [Gk. *beilato*] **you** to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13). The God who elects is the God who loves, and He loves the world. Can the notion of a God who arbitrarily chooses some and ignores the rest to their damnation stand under scrutiny in light of a God who loves the world?

In Jesus we also see foreknowledge. He knew that He would die on a cross (John 12:32), and He knew some of the details of that death (Mark 10:33–34). He knew that Judas would betray Him (John 13: 18–27) and that Peter would deny Him (Mark 14:29–31). But we certainly cannot read causation into His foreknowledge. After the lame man was healed, Peter graciously said that the Jerusalem Jews had acted ignorantly in crucifying Jesus, but also that Christ’s death fulfilled what God had spoken by the prophets (Acts 3:17–18). God did not **cause** them to crucify Jesus; they were yet to blame (Acts 4:27–28).<sup>77</sup> So when the Bible connects our election with foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:2) we should not see causation in that. God does not have to predestine in order to foreknow. The statement in Romans 8:29 that those whom “God foreknew he also predestined” does not lend support to such a notion. Foreknowledge in such a case would be a meaningless term.

Could we not see foreknowledge and predestination as two sides of a coin? The top side, foreknowledge, looks up toward God and reflects what He knows. Now in relation to our part in being saved, the Bible gives no clue as to **what** God foreknew. However, if one holds to a doctrine of absolute omniscience, His foreknowledge could surely include our repentance and faith in response to His drawing. In stating this,

<sup>77</sup>The New Testament shows clear evidence of the concept that the plan of salvation stretches back into eternity (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9–11; Titus 1:2–3; 1 John 1:1–3; 1 Pet. 1:18–21).

we have not compromised God's sovereign action by making it dependent on something we do. But if the Bible does not say *what* God foreknew, it clearly refers to *whom* (Rom. 8:29). Predestination, the bottom side of the coin, looks toward human beings and shows the sovereign working out of God's will.<sup>78</sup>

Further, it has been said that the verb "to foreknow" (Gk. *proginōskō*) suggests more than mental cognition. Both the Old and New Testaments use the word "know" to refer to the intimacy of relationship between husband and wife (Gen. 4:1, NRS; Luke 1:34, KJV) and to knowing that goes beyond mere facts about someone. Through Amos, the Lord says to Israel, "You only have I known" (3:2, NRS). Paul says, "I want to know Christ" (Phil. 3: 10). In addressing the "fathers" John says that they "have known him who is li-om the beginning" (1 John 2:13–14). These instances surely show that "knowing" in the Bible can include love and relationship. Can we, then, appropriately see in God's foreknowledge of us an expression of His love and concern? And God loves everyone in the world. He indeed foreknows cognitively all the thoughts and actions of all people. When, however, the Bible refers to those who believe in His Son, foreknowledge is applied to them and to them only. A loving Father presents a bride to His beloved Son.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup>Acts 13:48 says, "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." The verse makes a strong statement about some being appointed to eternal life. Although it does not state it, God did the appointing. Those of us who are not of a strong Calvinist persuasion must not weaken the statement to make it more cordial to our theological position. A couple of things could be said. Luke gives no basis for the appointing, but perhaps it is similar to Lucan ideas elsewhere that see Christ's death and resurrection as the result of God's "purpose and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23). Then, too, the possibility exists that the verb (Gk. *tetagmenoi*, from *tassō*) could be middle voice and not passive. In Acts 13:46, Paul says to the Jews, "Since you . . . do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles." They did not put themselves into a position that brought them eternal life. The verb *tassō* basically means "to place" or "station in a fixed spot." If this were middle, it could then be translated, "They believed, i.e., those who placed themselves in a position to receive eternal life." The Jews refused to; the Gentiles did. In reference to Acts 13:48, Arndt and Gingrich say about this verb, as a passive, that it conveys the idea of "belong to, be classed among those possessing." That comes close to the idea of the middle voice.

<sup>79</sup>The idea that foreknowledge could have the meaning of "forelove" does not force one to take the position of unconditional election, no more than does a particular view of what the Bible means by election and predestination. H. C. Thiessen says, "Foreknowledge, election, and predestination are simultaneous acts of God, though there is a logical sequence from one to the other" (Thiessen, *Lectures*, 259).

Those whom God foreknew (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:1) He elected in Christ<sup>80</sup> (Eph. 1:4) and predestined them "to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Rom. 8:29) and "for the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:11–12). In keeping with His sovereign and loving purpose expressed in His "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9), He calls people to himself (Isa. 55:1–8; Matt. 11:28). In the Old Testament God's calling had primarily to do with the people of Israel, beginning with their ancestor Abraham. In the New Testament the call became more universal and individualistic, primarily with saving purpose, though the emphasis differs. Sometimes the call refers to (1) a summons to follow Jesus (Matt. 4:21; Mark 2:14, 17; cf. Luke 18:22); (2) an active, inward calling by God, when referring to believers (Rom. 8:30; Eph. 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:9); (3) a description of those who respond (i.e., they are the "called" [1 Cor. 1:24]); or (4) the purpose to which God has called them (e.g., to be "saints" [Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2]).

In concluding the Parable of the Ring's Wedding Banquet (Matt. 22:1–14), Jesus said that "many are called [Gk. *klētoi*], but few are chosen [Gk. *eklektōi*]" (v. 13, NRS), in a context that certainly has eternal destiny in view (v. 13). "It shows that, at least from the standpoint of human response, the circle of the called and of the elect cannot be taken as necessarily coinciding." The very word "call" implies a response, and if we respond to it we become God's elect. If God's eternal purpose is particularly in view (cf. Eph. 1:4), we show ourselves to be among the elect.

When God calls us to himself for salvation, it is always a call of grace, regardless of any distinction we may make between "prevenient" grace<sup>82</sup> and "efficacious" grace. Can we resist this gracious call? Calvinism teaches that we cannot because God's working always achieves its end. His grace is efficacious. Just as God irresistibly called creation into existence, so He irresistibly calls people to redemption. If one

<sup>80</sup>Ephesians is talking about an elect Body. See Shank, *Elect*.

<sup>81</sup>Lothar Coenen, "Call," in *New International Dictionary*, vol. 1, 274–75.

<sup>82</sup>By "prevenient grace," Calvinists generally refer to God's gracious initiative in providing redemption for sinners. Based on what Christ did on the cross, Wesleyans see it as God's gracious initiative in drawing sinners to himself (John 6:44; 12:32), without which no one could come to Him.

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accepts the *ordo salutis* Calvinists propose, in which regeneration follows the calling but precedes repentance and faith, then certainly grace is irresistible. One has already been born again. The idea of resisting in such a case becomes nonsense.

Can it be said, however, that **the** very expression “irresistible grace” is technically improper? It appears to be an oxymoron, like “cruel kindness,” because the very nature of grace implies the offer of a free gift, and one can accept or reject a gift. That is true even if the gift is offered by a gracious, loving, and personal Sovereign who experiences no threat to, or diminishing of, His sovereignty if one refuses His gift. That is clearly evident in the Old Testament. The Lord says, “‘All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people’ ” (Isa. 65:2), and “‘I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen’ ” (Isa. 65: 12). The prophets made clear that the people’s refusal to receive God’s gracious expressions did not in the least compromise His sovereignty. Stephen storms at his hearers, “‘You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit’ ” (Acts 7:51). It appears evident that Stephen had in view their resistance to that Spirit that sought to draw them to God. That some later believed (e.g., Saul of Tarsus) is no evidence for the doctrine of irresistible grace.<sup>83</sup>

In addition, it needs to be said that if we cannot resist God’s grace, then nonbelievers will perish, not because they would not respond but because they could not. God’s grace would not be efficacious for them. God then looks more like a capricious sovereign who toys with His subjects than a God of love and grace. His “whosoever will” becomes a cruel game that has no equal, since God is the one who plays it. But the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ plays no games with us. When the arms of His Son stretched wide on the cross He embraced everyone, because God loves the world. God *is* love, and the very nature of love implies that it can be resisted or rejected. By its very nature love is vulnerable. It does no disservice to His magnificent greatness or His sovereignty to believe that we can refuse His love and grace which genuinely seek to draw all people to himself. Just the opposite is the case. A God whose love yearns for everyone

<sup>83</sup>In the story of the earnest young man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life, yet who refused Jesus’ conditions (Mark 10: 17–22), do we have another example of one who resisted God’s call of grace?

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to come to Him but does not irresistibly compel them to come, and whose heart breaks over their refusal, has to be a God of greatness beyond our **imagining**.<sup>84</sup>

There can be only one appropriate response to such great love: to repent and believe. We cannot, of course, produce these actions apart from divine enabling, but neither are they produced within us apart from our willingness. We must avoid extreme expressions of both synergism, a “working together,” and monergism, a “working alone.” Monergism finds its roots in Augustinianism and **affirms** that to be saved a person cannot and does not do anything whatever to bring that about. Conversion is entirely a work that God does. If a sinner chooses to repent and believe, God alone is the active agent. If a sinner chooses not to repent and believe, the fault is entirely his.

Extreme forms of synergism go back to Pelagius, who denied humankind’s essential depravity. But in its moderate evangelical expression it goes back to Arminius and, more important, to Wesley, both of whom emphasized our ability to freely choose, even in matters that affect our eternal destiny. We are depraved, but even the most depraved among us has not entirely lost the image of God. An evangelical **synergist affirms** that God alone saves, but he or she believes that universal exhortations to repent and believe make sense only if in fact we can accept or reject salvation. Salvation stems entirely from God’s grace, but to state that that is so does not require us to diminish our responsibility when confronted by the gospel.

## REPENTANCE AND FAITH

Repentance and faith constitute the two essential elements of conversion. They involve a turning from, i.e., repentance, and a turning to, i.e., faith. The primary words in the Old Testament for the idea of repentance are *shuv*, “to turn back,” “return,” and *nicbam*, “to be sorry,” “console.” *Shuv* occurs over one hundred times in a theological sense, either to turn from God (1 Sam. 15: 11; Jer. 3: 19) or to turn back to God (Jer. 3:7; Hos. 6:1). One may also turn from good (Ezek. 18:24,26) or turn from evil (Isa. 59:20; Ezek. 3:19), i.e., repent. The verb *nicbam* has an emotional aspect not evident in *shuv*, but both convey the idea of repentance.

<sup>84</sup>Let us remember too that God wants sons, not puppets. He could have programmed us to respond with political correctness, but that would not be love.

The New Testament uses *epistrephō* for the sense of “turning” to God (Acts 15:19; 2 Cor. 3:16) and *metanoeō/metanoia* for the idea of “repentance” (Acts 2:38; 17:30; 20:21; Rom. 2:4). The New Testament uses *metanoeō* to express the force of *shuv*, indicating an emphasis on the mind and will. But it is also true that in the New Testament *metanoia* is more than an intellectual change of mind. It stresses the fact that the whole person turns around and has a fundamental change of basic attitudes.

Although in itself repentance does not save, one cannot read the New Testament and be unaware of its emphasis on repentance. God “commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). The initial message of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2), Jesus (Matt. 4:17), and the apostles (Acts 2:38) was “Repent!”<sup>85</sup> All must repent for all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23).

Although repentance involves the emotions and the intellect, a primary component is the will. One has only to think of two **Herods**. Mark’s Gospel presents the enigma of **Herod Antipas**, an immoral despot who imprisoned John for denouncing **Herod’s** marriage to his brother’s wife, while at the same time he “feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man” (Mark 6:20). Apparently **Herod** believed in a resurrection (6:16), so he had some theological insight. One can hardly imagine that John did not force him to grapple with the opportunity to repent.

Paul confronted **Herod Agrippa II** with the king’s own belief in the prophetic statements about the Messiah, but he refused to be persuaded to become a Christian (Acts 26:28). He refused to repent even though he did not deny the truth of what Paul said about him. Like the Prodigal, all must say, “‘I will set out and go back to my father’ ” (Luke 15: 18). Conversion implies a “turning away from,” but it just as equally implies a “turning toward.” Although we must not suggest an absolute dichotomy, for one must trust in order to make the move to repent, the distinction is not inappropriate. When we believe, put our trust in God, we turn toward Him.

At the head of all such biblical statements stands: “Abraham believed [ Heb. *’aman*] the LORD, and he credited it to him

<sup>85</sup>The New Testament also suggests that repentance does not occur without divine aid. See Acts 11:18 and 2 Tim. 2:25.

as righteousness” (Gen. 1 5:6).<sup>86</sup> Moses connected Israel’s rebellion and failure to obey God with their failure to trust the Lord (Deut. 9:23–24). The faithlessness of Israel (Jer. 3:6–14) stands in sharp contrast to the faithfulness of God (Deut. 7:9; Ps. 89:1–8; Hos. 2:2,5; cf. Hos. 2:20). Faith involves trusting. One can “trust” or “rely on” (Heb. *batach*) the Lord with confidence. The person who does is blessed (Jer. 17:7). We rejoice because we put our trust in His name (Ps. 33:2 1) and in His unfailing love (Ps. 13:5). We can also “take refuge in” Him (Heb. *chasah*), an idea that affirms faith (Ps. 18:30; see also Isa. 57:13).

In the New Testament the verb *pisteuō*, “I believe, trust,” and the noun *pistis*, “faith,” occur about 480 times.<sup>87</sup> Only a few times does the noun reflect the Old Testament idea of faithfulness (e.g., Matt. 23:23; Rom. 3:3; Gal. 5:22; Titus 2:10; Rev. 13:10). Rather, it functions as a technical term, used almost exclusively to refer to an unqualified trust in, obedience to, and dependence on God (Rom. 4:24), Christ (Acts 16:31), the gospel (Mark 1 :15), or Christ’s name (John 1: 12). From this it is evident in the Bible that faith is no “leap into the dark.”

We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). Believing in the Son of God leads to eternal life (John 3:16). Without faith we cannot please God (Heb. 11:6). Faith, then, is the attitude of confident, obedient trust in God and in His faithfulness that characterizes every true child of God. It is our spiritual life-blood (Gal. 2:20).

One can argue that saving faith is a gift of God in such a way that the presence of religious yearnings, even among pagans, has no bearing on either faith’s presence or its exercise. Yet most **evangelicals affirm** that such universally present yearnings constitute evidence for the existence of a God to whom they are directed. Have such yearnings no reality, no validity in and of themselves, apart from direct divine activity?

We cannot, of course, exercise saving faith apart from di-

<sup>86</sup>We must, of course, avoid any suggestion that Abraham’s faith became a work that merited righteousness. The Bible never regards faith as meritorious.

The noun appears nowhere in the Gospel of John, only twice in 1 John, and four times in Revelation, apparently indicating that John stresses the activity of obedient faith. The Greek commonly uses the preposition *eis* (“into,” “unto”) with the verb to emphasize that faith is not mere intellectual assent. Faith in the New Testament is not passive. Even the noun stresses the active sense of trustful obedience.

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vine enabling, but does the Bible teach that when I believe I am simply giving God's gift back to Him? To protect the biblical teaching on salvation by grace through faith alone, must we insist that the faith is not really mine, but God's? Some cite certain verses as evidence for such an opinion. J. I. Packer says, "God is thus the author of all saving faith (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29)." H. C. Thiessen states that there is "a divine and human side of faith," and then goes on to say, "Faith is a gift of God (Rom. 12:3; 2 Pet. 1:1), sovereignly given by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 12:9; cf. Gal. 5:22). Paul speaks of the whole aspect of salvation as being a gift of God (Eph. 2:8), and surely that includes **faith**."<sup>88</sup>

But the question needs to be asked: Do all the references cited unequivocally refer to "saving" faith? That does not seem to be the case with Romans 12:3 and 1 Corinthians 12:9, and certainly not with Galatians 5:22. The faith in view in these verses refers to faith (or faithfulness) in the ongoing experience of believers. The verse in Ephesians is questionable, because the genders of "faith" and of the pronoun "this" are different. Ordinarily a pronoun will agree in gender with its antecedent. Paul means that the whole matter of our being saved is God's gift, as distinct from achieving it by works. The other two verses (Phil. 1:29 and 2 Pet. 1:1) come closest to suggesting that faith as a gift of God follows regeneration. Louis Berkhof says, "True saving faith is a faith that has its seat in the heart and is rooted in the regenerate life." Could we, however, look at these verses differently? For example, "Faith ... is man's response. Faith is made possible by God, but the faith, the believing, is not God's but **man's**." Faith is not a work but an outstretched hand that reaches out to accept God's gift of salvation.<sup>89</sup>

## REGENERATION

When we respond to God's call and the drawing of the Spirit and the Word, God performs sovereign acts that bring us into His kingdom family: He regenerates those who are dead in trespasses and sins; He justifies those who stand condemned before a holy God; and He adopts those who are children of the enemy. Although these occur simultaneously in the believing person, we can look at them separately.

<sup>88</sup>J. I. Packer, "Faith," in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 400. Thiessen, *Lectures*, 269.

<sup>89</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 503. Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 2, 28–29. See chap. 12, pp. 401, 414, 417–18.

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Regeneration is the decisive and instantaneous action of the Holy Spirit in which He recreates the inner nature. The noun for "regeneration" (Gk. *palingenesia*) appears just twice in the New Testament. Matthew 19:28 uses it in reference to the end times. Only in Titus 3:5 does the word refer to the spiritual renewing of an individual. Although the Old Testament has national Israel primarily in view, the Bible uses different images to describe what takes place. The Lord will "remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 11:19). God says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. ... I will give you a new heart and **put** a new spirit in you. ... And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees" (Ezek. 36:25–27). God will put His law "in their minds and write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). He will circumcise their hearts so that they may love Him (Deut. 30:6).

The New Testament has the image of being created anew (2 Cor. 5:17) and of renewal (Titus 3:5), but the most common image is that of "being born" (Gk. *gennaō*, "beget" or "bear"). Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). Peter states that through God's great mercy He "has given us new birth into a living hope" (1 Pet. 1:3). It is a work that God alone does. Being born again speaks of a radical transformation. But a maturing process is still needed. Regeneration initiates us into growing in our knowledge of God, in our experience of Christ and the Spirit, and in our moral **character**.<sup>90</sup>

## JUSTIFICATION

If regeneration effects a change in our nature, justification effects a change in our status with God. The term refers to that act by which, on the basis of the infinitely righteous and satisfactory work of Christ on the cross, God declares condemned sinners to be free from all the guilt of sin and from its eternal consequences and declares them to be fully righteous in His sight. The God who detests "acquitting the guilty" (Prov. 17:15) maintains His own justice while justifying the guilty because Christ has already paid the full penalty for sin

<sup>90</sup>See also John 1:13; 3:5,7–8; 1 Pet. 1:23; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,18. See chap. 16, pp. 559–61, for a discussion of the relation of water baptism to regeneration. Billy Graham, *World Aflame* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & CO., Inc., 1965), 141. See chap. 12, pp. 415–16.

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(Rom. 3:21-26). We, therefore, can and do stand before God fully acquitted.

To describe God's action of justifying us, the terms used by both the Old Testament (Heb. *tsaddiq*: Exod. 23:7; Deut. 25: 1; 1 Kings 8:32; Prov. 17: 15) and the New Testament (Gk. *dikaioō*: Matt. 12:37; Rom. 3:20; 8:33-34) suggest a judicial, forensic setting. We must not see it, however, as a legal fiction in which it is *as if we* are righteous when in fact we are not. Because we are in Him (Eph. 1:4,7,11), Jesus Christ has become our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). God credits, reckons, (Gk. *logizomai*) His righteousness to our account; it is imputed to us.

In Romans 4 Paul uses two Old Testament examples to argue for imputed righteousness. Of Abraham it was said that he "believed the LORD, and he credited [Heb. *chashav*] it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). This occurred before Abraham had obeyed God in relation to the covenant sign of circumcision. In perhaps an even more dramatic way, Paul quotes Psalm 32:2, in which David pronounces a blessing on "the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him" (4:8; see also 2 Cor. 5:19). To put to one's account the righteousness of another apart from any good a person may do is glorious enough. But to not hold the person accountable for his or her sins and evil acts is more glorious still. In justifying us God has graciously and justly, because of Christ's sacrifice---done both.

How does justification take place with reference to the believer? The Bible makes two things abundantly clear. First, it is not because of any good work on our part. In fact, "Christ died for nothing" if righteousness comes by obedience to the Law (Gal. 2:21). Any person who seeks to be righteous by obeying the Law stands under a curse (Gal. 3:10), has been "alienated from Christ," and has "fallen away from grace" (Gal. 5:4). Anyone who believes he or she is more justified after serving the Lord for five or fifty-five years or who thinks good works gain merit with God fails to understand this biblical teaching.

Second, at the very heart of the gospel stands the truth that justification finds its source in the free grace of God (Rom. 3:24) and its provision in the blood Christ shed on the cross (Rom. 5:19), and we receive it through faith (Eph. 2:8). Very commonly, when the idea of justification occurs in the New Testament, faith (or believing) can be found joined to it (cf. Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:26,28,30; 4:3,5; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:8). Faith is never the ground of justification. The New Testament never

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says justification is *diapistin*, "on account of faith," but always *dia pisteos*, "through faith." The Bible does not regard faith as meritorious, but rather as merely a hand outstretched to receive God's free gift. Faith has always been the means of justification, even in the case of the Old Testament saints (cf. Gal. 3:6-9).

Having been justified by grace through faith we do and will experience great benefits. We "have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1) and preservation "from God's wrath" (Rom. 5:9). We have the assurance of final glorification (Rom. 8:30) and present and future freedom from condemnation (Rom. 8:33-34; see also 8: 1). Justification leads to our becoming "heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7, NRS). In praise of justification, Charles Wesley wrote:

No condemnation now I dread;  
I am my Lord's and He is mine;  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine."

## ADOPTION

God does more, however, than give us right standing with himself. He also brings us into a new relationship; He adopts us into His family. A legal term, "adoption" is that act of sovereign grace by which God gives all the rights, privileges, and obligations of being in His family to those who receive Jesus Christ. Although the term does not appear in the Old Testament, the idea does (Prov. 17:2). The Greek word *bulothesia*, "adoption," appears five times in the New Testament, only in Paul's writings, and always with a religious sense. In becoming the children of God we do not, of course, become divine. Deity belongs only to the one true God.<sup>92</sup>

The New Testament teaching on adoption takes us from eternity past, through the present, and to eternity future (if such an expression is appropriate). Paul says that God "chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world" and

<sup>92</sup>From the hymn, "And Can It Be?" in *Sing His Praise* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1991), 294.

<sup>93</sup>The teaching exists that, because of creation, all people are children of God. Although there is a sense in which that is true, in the New Testament only those who are "in Christ" are the adopted children of God, with the full rights of being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. See McConnell, *A Different Gospel*. Especially chapter 7, "The Doctrine of Identification," 11633.



“predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:4–5). He says about our present experience, “You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the **Spirit**<sup>93</sup> of sonship [*buiotnesia*].<sup>94</sup> And by him we cry [*in* our own language], ‘**Abba** [Aramaic, Father ], Father’ [Gk. *ho patēr*]” (Rom. 8:15). We are fully sons though not yet fully mature. Then, in the future, when we lay aside mortality, we will receive “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23). Adoption is a present reality, but it will be fully realized in the resurrection from the **dead**.<sup>95</sup> God gives us these family privileges through the redeeming work of His unique Son, the One who is not ashamed to call us brothers (Heb. 2:11).

#### PERSEVERANCE

If the doctrine of election raises the ire of nonbelievers, among believers the doctrine of perseverance does the same. The caricatures that the proponents of the **differing** views give of every other view most often have no basis in reality. Some among the Wesleyan-Arminian persuasion insist that Calvinists believe once they are saved they can do whatever sinful thing they please, as often as they please, and still be saved-as if **they** believe the sanctifying work of the Spirit and the Word does not affect them. Whereas some Calvinists might insist that Wesleyan-Arminians believe any sin they commit jeopardizes their salvation, so that they “fall in and out of” being saved each time they sin-as if they believe that God’s love, patience, and grace are so fragile that they shatter at the slightest pressure. Any person who is biblically and theologically alert recognizes the lie in both of these caricatures. The presence of extremes has led to unfortunate **generalizations**.<sup>96</sup>

Of course, we must understand the impossibility of **ac-**

<sup>93</sup>English versions differ in how they translate *pneuma* here. **The RSV**, **NRS**, and **NASB** do not capitalize the word, though the **NASB** does in a footnote. **The KJV**, **NIV**, and **NEB** see it correctly as a reference to the Holy Spirit.

<sup>94</sup>As is so often the case when Christians are called sons or brothers, the meaning is generic and includes daughters and sisters.

<sup>95</sup>Paul suggests interesting contrasts in **His** use of the term. See Rom. 8:15,23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5,7; Eph. 1:3–7.

<sup>96</sup>I **having** been exposed by personal experience and in academic **settings** to the extremes, I have been frightened by the arrogant presumption some express and saddened by the terrorizing fear some experience.

cepting as equally true both the Calvinist and Wesleyan-Arminian positions. Either the Bible gives the assurance to a truly saved person that no matter how far at times the believer may depart from living out biblical Christianity he or she cannot and will not ultimately depart from the faith, or it does not. Both cannot be **true**.<sup>97</sup> But it is not impossible to seek a more balanced biblical orientation.

Biblically, perseverance does not mean that everyone who professes faith in Christ and becomes part of a community of believers is secure for eternity. In 1 John 2:18–19 we read that the rise of “antichrists” shows that “it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” This is a favorite camping ground of Calvinists to argue that those who “depart” from the faith so as to be lost were believers in name only. Some argue that Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9–24) is an example of such a person. Non-Calvinists do no service to their position by weakening the force of these statements. Not everyone in our churches, not everyone who gives apparent external evidence of faith, is a true believer. Jesus said to some who claimed extraordinary spiritual powers (which He did not deny), that He never knew them (Matt. 7:21–23). Such statements are not intended to strike fear in the heart of a genuine and simple-hearted believer, but to warn those who depend on external performance for assurance of salvation.

Biblically, perseverance refers to the ongoing operation of the Holy Spirit through which the work of God begun in our hearts will be carried on to completion (Phil. 1:6). It seems that no one, regardless of theological orientation, should object to such a statement. And one wishes it could be left at that. But in light of the necessity of seeking to exegete the Bible with integrity the wish proves impossible. What does the Bible say specifically in this matter?

Significant New Testament support exists for the Calvinist view. Jesus will lose nothing of all God has given Him (John 6:38–40). **The** sheep will never perish (10:27–30). God always hears Jesus’ prayers (11:42), and He prayed that the Father would keep safe and protect His followers (17:11).

<sup>97</sup>Such is the case of most doctrines and truth statements, unless, of course, one holds to the relativistic notions of so-called New Age thinking. Either God exists or **He** does not; either Christ is divine or **He** is not; and so on.

We are kept by Christ (1 John 5: 18). Nothing shall separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:35–39). The Holy Spirit in us is the seal and guarantee of our future redemption (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). God will guard what we commit to Him (2 Tim. 1: 12). He is able to save for all time those who believe (Heb. 7:24–25). His power guards us (1 Pet. 1:5). God in us is greater than anything outside of us (1 John 4:4). What grand assurances! No believer can or should live without them. And if that were all the New Testament had to say, the position of Calvinism would stand secure.

But there is more. Wesleyan-Arminians readily accept the strength and assurance of the above passages. But it appears that Calvinists sometimes resort to exegetical and **hermeneutical** twists and turns to avoid the implications of other passages in the New Testament.<sup>98</sup> Not merely formal but real apostasy is possible (Heb. 6:4–6; 10:26–31). The Greek word *apostasia*, “apostasy,” “rebellion,” comes from *aphistēmi*, “leave,” “go away,” conveying the idea of moving away from a place where one stands. Millard Erickson says, “The writer . . . is discussing a hypothetical situation. . . . Jesus [John 10:28] is telling us what *will* happen, namely His sheep will not perish. The Bible then can be understood as saying that we *could* fall away, but through the keeping power of Christ we *will* not.”<sup>99</sup>

If it could happen, why is it only hypothetically possible? Erickson and most Calvinists refer to Hebrews 6:9 as evidence: “Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case.” Such a justification is tenuous in light of Hebrews 6:11–12: “We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” Continuing in faith and practice makes sure a hope and an inheritance. Is it really possible to exegete Hebrews 10:26–31, even in spite of verse 39, in such a way as to conclude it refers merely to a logical but not a real possibility?<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup>See the excellent treatment of the New Testament data in Robert Shank, *Life in the Son* (Springfield, Mo.: Westcott Publishers, 1961).

<sup>99</sup>“Millard J. Erickson, *Does It Matter What I Relieve?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 134.

<sup>100</sup>See Shank, *Life*, chap. 19, “Is Apostasy Without Remedy?” pp. 307–29, for a discussion of the impossibility of restoration. Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), discusses Heb. 6 in relation to perseverance, but not this passage.

To state the case further, Jesus warns, “‘The love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved’” (Matt. 24:12–13). He says that looking back makes us unfit for the Kingdom (Luke 9:62) and tells us, “‘Remember Lot’s wife!’” (Luke 17:32). He also says that if a person does not abide in Him, that person will be cut off (John 15:6; cf. Rom. 11: 17–21; 1 Cor. 9:27). Paul says that we can be alienated from Christ and fall away from grace (Gal. 5:4); that some have shipwrecked their faith (1 Tim. 1:19); that some will abandon (Gk. *aphistēmi*) the faith (1 Tim. 4: 1); and that if “we disown him, he will also disown us” (2 Tim. 2: 12). The writer of Hebrews says that “we are His [God’s] house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast” (3:6); that we should see to it that none of us “has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away [Gk. *aphistamai*] from the living God” (3: 12); and that we “have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first” (3:14).

Peter speaks of those who “have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome[;] they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known<sup>101</sup> it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: ‘A dog returns to its vomit,’ and ‘A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud’” (2 Pet. 2:20–22).

John says that eternal life is not the believer’s possession independently of possessing Christ (1 John 5:11–12). The Father “has granted the Son to have life in himself” in the same sense as the Father has life by His own right and nature (John 5:26). He has not granted that to us. Eternal life is Christ’s life in us, and we have it only as we are “in Christ.”

In dealing with these warnings as essentially hypothetical for a true believer, Calvinists use various illustrations. Erickson refers to parents who fear their child may run into the

<sup>101</sup>In all three uses the word for “know” is the root *epiginōskō*. The compound word conveys a fullness of knowledge that goes beyond mere head knowledge. See 1 Cor. 13:12; Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:6, 10; 3:10; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Pet. 1:2. In commenting on these verses, the *NIV Study Bible* refers to those who say that the “person described here could not have been genuinely saved.” In view of the meaning of *epiginōskō*, that appears an impossible position to take.

street and be struck by a car. They have two options. Build a fence so that it would be physically impossible for the child to leave the yard. But that restricts the child's freedom. Or warn the child of the danger of running into the street. In that case the child could run into the street, but he won't. However, if the cars, i.e., the dangers, do not really exist and the child knows that, can the warning really function as a **deterrent**?<sup>102</sup>

Allow another analogy. Let us say we were driving on a highway at night. Every few miles we came across warning signs. They warned of a sharp curve ahead, of a bridge that was out, of falling rocks, of a narrow, winding road, of a steep grade, of major construction, etc., but not one of the dangers materialized. What would we think? A prankster or a fool has been at work. In what way are they warnings if they do not correspond to reality?

Calvinists argue that they have assurance of salvation because of their position, whereas Wesleyan-Arminians don't. Is this really so? In view of passages like chapters 6 and 10 of Hebrews and the others above, how can Calvinists claim they have greater assurance than Arminians? How can they be sure they are one of the elect until they get to heaven? If one can be as close to the Kingdom as the letter to the Hebrews and 2 Peter and Matthew 7:22 describe and still not be "in" the Kingdom, where does their greater assurance come from? Actually, the assurance given to all true believers by the Holy Spirit who lives in us is that by grace through faith we are in Christ, who is our redemption and righteousness, and since we are in Him we are secure. This applies whether one is a Calvinist or a Wesleyan-Arminian. Both agree the Bible teaches that we dare not presume and that we need not **fear**.<sup>103</sup>

A fitting way to close this chapter is with worship in the words of the immortal hymn by Isaac Watts.

When I survey the wondrous cross,  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

<sup>102</sup>Erickson, *Christian Doctrine*, 32 1-22.

<sup>103</sup>See William T. Abraham, "Predestination and Assurance" in Pinnock, *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, 231-42, and R. E. O. White, "Perseverance," in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 844-45, for balanced, moderating, and helpful treatments.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ, my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.  
See, from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?  
Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my **all**.<sup>104</sup>

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The Bible says that Christ is a Lamb "slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8); that He "was handed over ... by God's set purpose and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23); and that God "chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). What are the possibilities that God's eternal love embraces eternal suffering? Does God ever cease to grieve over people who are eternally separated from Him?

2. Based on 2 Corinthians 5:21 (and similar passages) some teach that Christ's nature changed and, after suffering in hell as a sinner, He had to be born again. Why is this teaching both unbiblical and heretical?

3. What is the biblical teaching on the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament?

4. What feeling response do you have to the Christian claim of exclusiveness in relation to eternal salvation? How can one help nonbelievers to understand?

5. We know and believe the Bible when it says we are not saved by works (Eph. 2:9), but how can we avoid falling into the trap of supposing that our good works are meritorious?

6. Discuss the teaching of some that in different dispensations God had different ways of effecting salvation for humankind.

7. The Bible teaches that Christ's death was a ransom for us. Why is it inappropriate even to ask to whom the ransom was paid?

8. Discuss the statement: Those who think lightly of the disease will loiter on the way to the physician.

<sup>104</sup>*Sing His Praise*, 455.