

Systematic Theology

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CONTENTS

PREFACE TO 2003 EDITION	4
1. THEOLOGY.....	5
THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY.....	5
THE POSSIBILITY OF THEOLOGY.....	6
THE NECESSITY OF THEOLOGY.....	9
2. SCRIPTURE.....	13
THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE.....	13
THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE.....	15
THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE.....	18
THE INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE.....	21
THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE.....	22
THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE.....	23
THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE.....	24
THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE.....	26
3. GOD.....	28
THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.....	28
THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.....	44
THE WORKS OF GOD.....	91
4. MAN.....	99
THE CREATION OF MAN.....	99
THE NATURE OF MAN.....	105
THE FALL OF MAN.....	120
5. CHRIST.....	127
THE PERSON OF CHRIST.....	127
THE LIFE OF CHRIST.....	130
THE WORK OF CHRIST.....	132
THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST.....	147
6. SALVATION.....	163
ELECTED.....	163
SUMMONED.....	189
REGENERATED.....	190
CONVERTED.....	191
JUSTIFIED.....	196
ADOPTED.....	200
SANCTIFIED.....	203
PRESERVED.....	205

PREFACE TO 2003 EDITION

The most important task a Christian can perform at any stage of his spiritual development is to study systematic theology. This may sound extreme to the anti-intellectual mindset of popular Christianity, but it is a necessary conclusion derived from the nature of theology. Theological study possesses intrinsic value, and it is the precondition of every Christian concept and activity. For example, it is the intellectual enterprise of theology that governs the object and mode of prayer, defines the reason and manner of worship, and formulates the message and strategy for evangelism.

I consider this book an adequate text for the beginning reader. Perhaps some will even find it challenging. But being an introduction, it cannot include everything important to a comprehensive understanding of theology. And since its primary purpose is to provide a positive construction or statement of biblical doctrines, the emphasis is not on polemics. The reader should pursue my other writings for more detailed discussions on the topics mentioned in the following chapters.

This book emphasizes the interrelatedness of biblical doctrines, and arranges them in a logical progression – from the epistemological precondition of a worldview to the preservation of the believer. The three central motifs of this book are the infallibility of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, and the centrality of the mind. Some of my other works offer additional explanation and defense of these biblical pillars of the Christian system. Especially relevant is my book, *Ultimate Questions*, which serves well as a companion text to *Systematic Theology* by giving biblical answers to the questions of epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and soteriology. Whereas *Systematic Theology* is an outline of Christian theology, *Ultimate Questions* is an outline of Christian philosophy and apologetics.

1. THEOLOGY

Theological reflection is the most important activity a human being can perform. This statement may astonish some readers, but an explanation of the meaning and implications of the theological enterprise should provide justification for such a claim. We will consider the nature, possibility, and necessity of this field of study in the next several pages.

THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY

The word THEOLOGY refers to the study of God. When used in a broader sense, the word may include all the other doctrines revealed in Scripture. Now, God is the supreme being who has created and even now sustains all that exists, and theology seeks to understand and articulate in a systematic manner information revealed to us by him. Thus, theology concerns itself with ultimate reality. Since it is the study of the ultimate, nothing is more important. Because it contemplates and discusses the ultimate, it in turn defines and governs every area of life and thought. Therefore, as long as God is the ultimate being or reality, theological reflection is the ultimate human activity.

This book is a presentation of several major biblical doctrines that come under the study of systematic theology. A doctrine consists of a set of propositions relating to a certain theological topic – it is the biblical teaching on a given subject. Theology then refers to the study of Scripture or the systematic formulation of doctrines from Scripture. A truly biblical doctrine is always authoritative and binding, and a system of theology is authoritative only to the extent that it reflects the teaching of Scripture.

Many warn against studying theology for its own sake. The anti-intellectual spirit of the age has so infiltrated the church that they refuse to believe that any intellectual activity possesses intrinsic value. To them, even knowing God must serve a greater purpose, probably a pragmatic or ethical one. Although the knowledge of God ought to affect one's conduct, it is nevertheless a mistake to think that the intellectual enterprise of theology serves a purpose that is greater than itself. Christians should affirm that since to study theology is to know God, and knowing God is the highest purpose of man, theology therefore possesses intrinsic value. Jeremiah 9:23-24 says:

This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: *that he understands and knows me*, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

There is no higher purpose for which the knowledge of God intends to reach, and there is no higher purpose for man but to know God. Theological knowledge produces moral

demands and other effects in one's life, but these are not higher purposes than the theological task of knowing the verbal revelation of God.

THE POSSIBILITY OF THEOLOGY

A prerequisite to constructing a theological system is to establish that theological knowledge is possible. Jesus says that "God is Spirit" (John 4:24); he transcends the spatio-temporal existence of man. The question then arises as to how human beings may know anything about him. Deuteronomy 29:29 has the answer:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things *revealed* belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all *the words* of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

Theology is possible because God has revealed himself to us through the words of the Bible.

God has revealed his existence, attributes, and moral demands to every human being by including such information within the mind of man. The very structure of the human mind includes some knowledge about God. This innate knowledge in turn causes man to recognize creation as the work of a creator. The grandeur, magnitude, and complex design of nature serve to remind man of his innate knowledge about God.

The heavens are declaring the glory of God, The vast expanse displays his handiwork. Day after day they "pour forth speech"; Night after night they display knowledge. They have no speech, there are no words; No sound is heard from them. Their "voice" goes out into all the earth, Their words to the ends of the world. (Psalm 19:1-3)¹

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:18-21)²

¹ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*; Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.; p. 396. The NIV reads, "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."

² "...ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind's understanding of created things. And so these people have no excuse..." (v. 20, NJB).

Although the testimony of nature concerning its creator is evident, man's knowledge of God does not come from the observation of creation. A later passage in Romans informs us that the knowledge of God does not come from empirical procedures, but that it has been directly "written" on the mind of man – it is an innate knowledge:

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do *by nature* things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are *written on their hearts*, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. (Romans 2:14-15)³

Theologians call this God's GENERAL REVELATION. This knowledge of God is innate in the mind of man and does not originate from observing the external world. Man does not infer from what he observes in nature that there must be a God; rather, he knows the God of the Bible prior to having access to any empirical data. The role of observation is to stimulate the mind of man to recall this innate knowledge of God, which has been suppressed by sin, and it is also by this innate knowledge that man interprets nature.

Every person has an innate knowledge of God, and everywhere he looks nature reminds him of it. His every thought and every experience gives irrefutable testimony for God's existence and attributes; the evidence is inescapable. Therefore, those who deny the existence of God are accused of suppressing the truth by their wickedness and rebellion, and that in claiming to be wise, they have become fools (Romans 1:22). In other words, God's general revelation of his existence and attributes through his creation – that is, the innate knowledge in man and the characteristics of the universe – renders those who deny his existence without excuse, and so they are rightly condemned.

Although one has an innate knowledge of the existence and attributes of God, and the created universe serves as a constant reminder, general revelation is insufficient to grant a saving knowledge of God and of information impossible to be so obtained. Thus, God has revealed what has pleased him to show us through verbal or propositional revelation – that is, the Scripture. This is his SPECIAL REVELATION. Through it, one gains rich and precise information concerning God and the things of God. It is also through the Scripture that one may obtain a saving knowledge of God. One who studies and obeys the Scripture gains salvation in Christ:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy

³ "So, when gentiles, not having the Law, still through their own *innate sense* behave as the Law commands, then, even though they have no Law, they are a law for themselves. They can demonstrate the effect of the Law *engraved on their hearts*, to which their own conscience bears witness..." (v. 14-15, NJB).

Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

Knowledge of God is also possible only because God has made man in his own image, so that there is a point of contact between the two despite the transcendence of God. Animals or inanimate objects cannot know God the way man can even if they are presented with his verbal revelation.

God has chosen to reveal information to us through the Bible – in words rather than images or experiences. Verbal communication has the advantage of being precise and accurate when properly done. Since this is the form of communication that the Bible assumes, a worthy theological system must be derived from the propositions found in Scripture, and not any non-verbal means of communication such as religious feelings or experiences.

Now, every system of thought begins from a first principle, and uses deductive or inductive reasoning, or both, to derive the rest of the system. A system that uses inductive reasoning is unreliable and collapses into skepticism,⁴ since induction is always a formal fallacy, in that it often depends on empirical data, and that it produces universal conclusions from particulars. Absolute certainty only comes from deductive reasoning, in which particulars are deduced from universals by logical necessity.

However, since deductive reasoning never produces information that is not already implicit in the premises, the first principle of a deductive system must contain all the information for the rest of the system. This means that a first principle that is too narrow will fail to yield a sufficient number of propositions to provide its adherents with a meaningful amount of knowledge. Thus, both induction and an inadequate first principle in a deductive system make knowledge impossible.

Even if a first principle appears to be broad enough, we must provide justification for affirming it. Its justification cannot come from a higher authority or principle, for then it would not be the first principle or the ultimate authority within the system. A lower authority or principle within the system cannot verify the first principle, since it is on this very first principle that this lower authority or principle depends. Therefore, a first principle of a system of thought must be self-authenticating – it must prove itself true.

The ultimate authority within the Christian system is Scripture; therefore, our first principle is biblical infallibility, or the proposition, "The Bible is the word of God." Although there are compelling arguments to support such a first principle even if one were to employ empirical methods, such that no unbeliever can refute them, the Christian must regard them as inconclusive since empirical methods are unreliable.⁵ Moreover, if we were to depend on science or other empirical procedures to verify the truth of Scripture, these tests would then stand as judge over the very word of God, and thus

⁴ The self-contradictory position that knowledge is impossible.

⁵ See my other writings that show how scientific and empirical methods of investigation preclude the discovery of truth.

Scripture would no longer be the ultimate authority in our system.⁶ As Hebrews 6:13 says, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself." Since God possesses ultimate authority, there is no higher authority by which one may pronounce Scripture as infallible.

However, not every system that claims divine authority has within its first principle the content to prove itself. A sacred text might contradict itself, and self-destructs. Another might admit dependence on the Christian Bible, but then the Bible condemns all other alleged revelations. Now, if the Bible is true, and it claims exclusivity, then all other systems of thought must be false. Therefore, if one affirms a non-Christian worldview, he must at the same time reject the Bible.

This generates a clash between the two worldviews. When this happens, the Christian can be confident that his system of thought is impervious to the attacks from others, but the biblical system itself provides the content for both defense and offense in such encounters. The Christian may destroy his opponent's worldview by questioning the first principles and subsidiary propositions of the system. Does the first principle of the system contradict itself? Does it fail to satisfy its own requirements?⁷ Does the system crumble because of the fatal problems of empiricism and induction? Does its subsidiary propositions contradict one another? Does it borrow Christian premises not deducible from its own first principle?⁸ Does the system give adequate and coherent answers to the ultimate questions, such as those concerning epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics?

To repeat, the first principle of the Christian system is biblical infallibility, or the proposition, "The Bible is the word of God." From this first principle, the theologian proceeds to construct a comprehensive system of thought based on infallible divine revelation. To the extent that his reasoning is correct, every part of the system is deduced by logical necessity from the infallible first principle, and is thus equally infallible. And since the Bible is the verbal revelation of God, who demands our worship and commands our conscience, a system of theology deduced with logical validity is authoritative and binding. Therefore, to the extent that this book is accurate in presenting what Scripture teaches, its content summarizes what all men ought to believe, what Christians have pledged to believe, and what is objectively true.

THE NECESSITY OF THEOLOGY

Theology is necessary not only for Christian activities, but also for all of life and thought. Since God is both ultimate and omnipotent, he has the right and the ability to address

⁶ As a minor part of his apologetic strategy, the Christian may employ empirical arguments to refute objections from unbelievers, who often claim to rely on empirical data. Nevertheless, the strongest arguments for Christianity do not depend on empirical reasoning and induction, which are fatally flawed. I have argued elsewhere that empiricism renders knowledge impossible.

⁷ For example, a principle stating that every assertion must be empirically verified cannot itself be empirically verified. The principle self-destructs.

⁸ For more information on induction and deduction, empiricism and rationalism, first principles, worldviews, and how to defend the Christian faith, see Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions*, *Presuppositional Confrontations*, and *The Light of Our Minds*.

every aspect of our lives. Theology seeks to understand and systematize his verbal revelation, and it is authoritative to the extent that it reflects the teaching of Scripture. The necessity of theology is a question of the necessity of communication from God. Since this is God's universe, the ultimate source of information and interpretation regarding all of life and thought is divine revelation. And since it is necessary to hear from God, theology is necessary.

Theology is central to all of life and thought because it deals with the verbal revelation that comes from the supreme being – the essential reality that gives existence and meaning to everything. For example, ignorance of musical theories has no direct relevance to one's ability to do algebra or to reason about moral issues. However, ignorance regarding divine revelation affects all of life and thought, from one's view toward history and philosophy, to one's interpretation of music and literature, to one's understanding of mathematics and physics.

Since this is God's universe, only his interpretation about anything is correct, and he has revealed his thoughts to us through the words of the Bible. It follows that an ignorance of theology means that one's interpretation of every subject will lack the defining factor that puts it into the proper perspective. In the area of ethics, for example, it is impossible to set forth any universally binding moral principle without an appeal to God. Even the concepts of right and wrong remain undefined without his verbal revelation. And since the Bible is the only objective and public divine revelation, the only way to appeal to God's authority is by an appeal to the Bible.

One of the greatest reasons for studying theology is the intrinsic value of knowledge about God. Every other category of knowledge is a means to an end, but the knowledge of God is a worthy end in itself. And since God has revealed himself through the Scripture, to know the Scripture is to know him, and this means to study theology.

Succumbing to the anti-intellectual spirit of the age, some believers distinguish between *knowing* God and *knowing about* God. If "knowing about" God refers to the formal study of theology, then to them one may know much about God without knowing him, and one may know God without knowing much about him. A person's theological knowledge is disproportionate to how well he knows God.

But if it is possible to know God without knowing very much about him, what does it mean to know God? If knowing God means to have fellowship with him, then it involves communication, which in turn necessitates the exchange of thought and intellectual content, thus bringing back the concept of knowing *about* something. One cannot communicate with another without exchanging information in the form of propositions, or in a manner in which the information conveyed is reducible to propositions.

How does one know God, if not through knowing *about* him? Some may answer that we know God through religious experience, but even that is defined and interpreted by theology, or knowledge *about* God. What is a religious experience? How does one know he has received one? What does a particular feeling or sensation mean? Answers to these

questions can only come by studying God's verbal revelation. Even if it is possible to know God through religious experience, what one has gained is still knowledge *about* God, or intellectual information reducible to propositions.

One may claim to know God through prayer and worship. But both the object and practice of prayer and worship remain undefined until one studies theology. Before one can pray and worship, one must first determine to whom one must offer prayer and worship. Afterward, he must determine from biblical revelation the way in which he must offer prayer and worship. Scripture governs every aspect of prayer and worship. Knowledge of God therefore comes from his verbal revelation, and not from non-verbal means or religious exercises. Most people who resist theological studies have not thought through these questions, but they are able to pray and worship by assuming, often without warrant, the object and manner of these spiritual practices.

Yet another person may say that we get to know God by walking in love. But again, the concept of love remains undefined until one studies theology. Even the relationship between knowing God and walking in love originates from the Bible:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.
Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.
Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.
(1 John 4:7-8)

Without this and other similar passages in the Bible, one cannot justify the claim that to know God is to walk in love. Many who claim to know God through walking in love are doing nothing other than being kind to others, with kindness as defined by societal norms rather than the Scripture. These individuals possess nothing more than an illusion of knowing God.

Once a person attempts to answer the above questions about how one comes to know God, he is doing theology. The matter then becomes whether his theology is correct. Therefore, theology is unavoidable. Whereas an erroneous theology leads to spiritual and practical disaster, an accurate one leads to genuine worship and godly living.

One slogan that reflects the anti-intellectual attitude of many Christians says, "Give me Jesus, not exegesis." However, it is the Scripture that gives us information about Jesus, and it is through biblical exegesis that we ascertain the meaning of Scripture. Without exegesis, therefore, one cannot know Jesus. One only needs to test this assertion by questioning those who say such things as this slogan on what they know about Jesus. Most of the time, their version of Jesus does not remotely resemble the biblical account. This means that they do not know him after all, let alone other important theological topics such as biblical infallibility, divine election, and church government. What we need to say is, "Give me Jesus *through* exegesis."

A repudiation of theology is also a refusal to know God through the way prescribed by him. Knowing the Scripture – knowing *about* God or studying theology – is prior to all of

human life and thought. Theology defines and gives meaning to all that one may think or do. It ranks above all other necessities (Luke 10:42); no other task or discipline approaches it in significance. Therefore, the study of theology is the most important human activity.

2. SCRIPTURE

We have established that the Scripture is the ultimate authority in the Christian system, and that our knowledge of God depends on it. Therefore, it is appropriate to begin the study of theology by examining the attributes of Scripture.

THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE

We must emphasize the verbal or propositional nature of biblical revelation. At a time when many deprecate the value of words in favor of images and feelings, we must note that God chose to reveal himself through the words of human language. Verbal communication is an adequate means of conveying information from and about God. This not only affirms the value of Scripture as a meaningful divine revelation, but it also affirms the value of preaching and writing as ways to communicate the mind of God as set forth in the Bible.

The very nature of the Bible as a propositional revelation testifies against the popular notions that human language is inadequate to speak about God, that images are superior to words, that music is of greater value than preaching, or that religious experiences can teach a person more about divine things than doctrinal studies.

Some argue that the Bible speaks in a language that produces vivid images in the mind of the reader. However, this is only a description of the reaction of some readers; other readers may not respond the same way to the same passages, although they may grasp the same information from them. So this does not count against the use of words as the best form of theological communication.

If images are superior, then why does the Bible not contain any drawings? Would not their inclusion be a way to ensure that no one forms the wrong mental pictures, if images are indeed an essential element in theological communication? Even if images are important in theological communication, the fact that God chose to use word images instead of actual drawings implies that words are sufficient, if not superior. But besides word images, the Scripture also uses words to discuss the things of God in abstract terms, not associated with any images.

A picture is not worth more than a thousand words. Suppose we present a drawing of Christ's crucifixion to a person with no Christian background. Without any verbal explanation, it would be impossible for him to ascertain the reason for his crucifixion and the significance it has for mankind. The picture itself shows no relationship between the event to anything spiritual or divine. The picture does not show whether the event was historical or fictional. The person looking at the drawing would not know if the one being put to death was guilty of any crime, and there would be no way of knowing the words he spoke while on the cross. Unless there are at least several hundred words explaining the

picture, the image itself carries no theological meaning. But once there are that many words to explain it, one would hardly need the picture.

The view that extols music over verbal communication suffers the same criticisms. It is impossible to derive any religious meaning from music if it is performed without words. It is true that the Book of Psalms consists of a large collection of songs, providing us with a rich heritage for worship, reflection, and doctrine. However, the original tunes do not accompany the words of the psalms; no musical notation accompanies any of the songs in the Bible. In the mind of God, the value of the biblical psalms is in the words and not the tunes. Although music plays a role in Christian worship, its importance does not approach that of the words of Scripture or the ministry of preaching.

As for religious experiences, even a vision of Christ is not worth more than a thousand words from Scripture. One cannot test the validity of a religious experience, be it a healing miracle or an angelic visitation, without knowledge of the Scripture. The most spectacular supernatural encounters are void of meaning without verbal communication to inform the mind.

The entire Exodus episode could not have occurred if God had remained silent when he appeared to Moses through the burning bush. As Jesus appeared in a bright light on the road to Damascus, what if he had refused to answer when Saul of Tarsus asked him, "Who are you, Lord?" The only reason Saul realized who was speaking to him was because Jesus answered with the words, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:3-6). Religious experiences are meaningless unless accompanied by verbal communication carrying intellectual content.

Another erroneous perception regarding the nature of the Bible is to regard the Scripture as a mere record of revelatory discourses and events, rather than God's revelation in itself. The person of Christ, his actions, and his miracles revealed the mind of God, but it is a mistake to think that the Bible is merely a written account of them. The words of the Bible themselves constitute God's revelation to us, and not only the events to which they refer.

Some fear that a strong devotion to Scripture implies prizing the record of a revelatory event more than the event itself. But if the Scripture possesses the status of divine revelation, then this concern is without warrant. Paul explains that "All *Scripture* is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). Scripture itself was breathed out by God. Although the events that the Bible records may be revelatory, the only objective divine revelation with which we have direct contact is the Bible.

Since the high view of Scripture we advocate here is the only one that the Bible itself affirms, Christians must reject every proposed doctrine of Scripture that compromises our access to the infallible revelation of God. Holding to a lower view of Scripture destroys revelation as one's ultimate authority, and it is then impossible to overcome the resulting problem of epistemology.¹

¹ See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions*.

As long as one denies that Scripture is divine revelation in itself, it remains "just a book," and one hesitates to give it complete reverence, as if it is possible to excessively adore it. There are so-called Christian ministers who urge believers to look to "the Lord of the book, not the book of the Lord," or something to this effect. But since the words of Scripture were breathed out by God, and those words are our only objective and explicit revelation from God, it is impossible to look to the Lord without looking to his book. Since the words of Scripture are the very words of God, one is looking to the Lord only to the extent that he is looking to the words of the Bible. Our contact with God is through the words of Scripture. Proverbs 22:17-21 indicates that to trust the Lord is to trust his words:

Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise; *apply your heart to what I teach*, for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips. *So that your trust may be in the LORD*, I teach you today, even you. Have I not written thirty sayings for you, sayings of counsel and knowledge, *teaching you true and reliable words*, so that you can give sound answers to him who sent you?

God rules his church through the Bible; therefore, our attitude toward it reflects our attitude toward God. No one who loves God does not love his words just as much. Those who claim to love him ought to demonstrate it by a zealous obsession with his words:

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long...How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
(Psalm 119:97, 103)

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. (Psalm 19:9-10)

A person loves God only to the extent that he loves the Scripture. There may be other indications of one's love for God, but love for his word is a necessary element, by which all other aspects of one's spiritual life are measured.

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

The Bible is the verbal or propositional revelation of God. It is God speaking to us. It is the voice of God itself. The very nature of the Bible indicates that verbal communication is the best way to convey divine revelation. No other way of knowing God is superior to studying the Scripture, and no source of information about God is more precise, accurate, and comprehensive.

The apostle Paul says:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

All the words of the Bible were breathed out by God.² Everything that can be called Scripture was breathed out by God. That the Scripture is "God-breathed" refers to its divine origin. All of Scripture proceeds from God; therefore, we rightly call the Bible, "the word of God." This is the doctrine of DIVINE INSPIRATION.

The content of Scripture consists of the entire Old and New Testaments, sixty-six documents in total, functioning as an organic whole. The apostle Peter gives explicit endorsement to Paul's writings, recognizing their status as inspired Scripture:

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do *the other Scriptures*, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:15-16)

Peter explains that the men who wrote Scripture were "carried along by the Holy Spirit," so that no part of it "had its origin in the will of man," or by "the prophet's own interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The Bible is an exact verbal revelation from God, so much so that Jesus said, "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" (Matthew 5:18). God exercised such precise control over the Bible's production that its content, to the very letter, is what he desired to set in writing.

This high view of scriptural inspiration does not imply dictation. God did not dictate his word to the prophets and apostles as an employer would dictate his letters to a secretary. At first one may tend to think that dictation would be the highest form of inspiration, but this is not so. An employer may dictate his words to the secretary, but he has no control over the daily details of the latter's life – whether past, present, or future – and still less does he have power over the secretary's thoughts.

In contrast, the Bible teaches that God exercises total and precise control over every detail of his creation, to the extent that even the thoughts of men are under his control.³

² The word translated "given by inspiration of God" (KJV) or "inspired by God" (NASB) is *theopneustos*. It means expiration (to breath out) rather than inspiration (to breath in), thus the "God-breathed" in the NIV. Although "inspiration" is an acceptable theological term referring to the divine origin of Scripture, and as such remains useful, it fails to convey the literal meaning of *theopneustos*.

³ The Bible denies that man has "free will." Although the will of man exists as a function of the mind, it is not "free" in the sense that it can function independently from God's control. I will take up this topic later in this book.

This is true of every individual, including the biblical writers. God so ordained, directed, and controlled the lives and thoughts⁴ of his chosen instruments, that when the time came, their personalities and backgrounds were perfectly suited for writing those portions of Scripture God had assigned to them.⁵

The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." (Exodus 4:11-12)

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." ...Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth." (Jeremiah 1:4-5, 9)

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ...But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles...(Galatians 1:11-12, 15-16)

Then, at the time of writing, the Spirit of God superintended the process so that the content of Scripture was beyond what the writers' natural intelligence could conceive.⁶ The product was the verbal revelation of God, and it was to the very letter what he desired to set in writing. God did not *find* the right people to write Scripture; he *made* the right people to write it, and then superintended the writing process.⁷

Therefore, the inspiration of Scripture does not refer only to the times when the Holy Spirit exercised special control over the biblical writers, although that indeed happened, but the preparation began before the creation of the world. The theory of dictation, which the Bible does not teach, is in comparison a lower view of inspiration, ascribing to God less control over the process.

This view of inspiration explains the so-called "human element" evident in Scripture. The biblical documents reflect the various social, economic, and intellectual backgrounds of the authors, their different personalities, and their unique vocabularies and literary styles. This phenomenon is what one would expect given the biblical view of inspiration, in

⁴ God determines every detail of a person's life – his ancestry, wealth, intelligence, education, personality, life span, geographical location, etc. Later sections of this book discuss the sovereignty of God.

⁵ God's precise control over men does not apply only to the prophets and apostles, but to every person (even the reprobate). However, God specifically ordered the lives of the biblical writers to the end that they may be prepared to write Scripture when the time came.

⁶ Scripture exceeds what human beings could produce without divine inspiration, but it is not beyond the ability of human beings to read and understand.

⁷ Some call this position ORGANIC INSPIRATION, but others consider the term ambiguous or misleading.

which God exercised total control over the writers' lives, and not only the writing process. The "human element" of Scripture, therefore, does not damage the doctrine of inspiration, but is consistent with and explained by it.

THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE

The inspiration of Scripture implies the unity of Scripture. That the words of Scripture proceeded from a single divine mind implies that the Bible should exhibit a perfect coherence. This is what we find in the Bible. Although the distinct personality of each biblical writer is evident, the content of the whole Bible exhibits a unity and design that betrays a single divine author. Internal consistency characterizes the various scriptural documents, so that one part does not contradict another.

Jesus assumes the coherence of Scripture as he responds to the following temptation from Satan:

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4:5-7)

Satan encourages Jesus to jump from the temple by citing Psalm 91:11-12. Jesus counters with Deuteronomy 6:16, implying that Satan's use of the passage contradicts the instruction from Deuteronomy, and therefore it is a misapplication. When one understands or applies a passage of Scripture in a manner that contradicts another passage, he mishandles the text. Christ's argument here assumes the unity of Scripture, and even the devil does not challenge it.

On another occasion, as Jesus deals with the Pharisees, his challenge to them assumes the unity of Scripture and the law of noncontradiction:

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. (Matthew 22:41-46)

Since David was "speaking by the Spirit," he could not have erred. But if Christ was to be a descendent of David, how could he be his Lord at the same time? That this poses a problem in the first place means that both Jesus and his audience assume the unity of Scripture and the law of noncontradiction. If they acknowledge that the Scripture

contradicts itself, or that one can affirm two contradictory propositions, then Jesus would not be making a meaningful point at all. The answer here is that the Messiah is to be both divine and human, and therefore both "Lord" and "son" to David.

But it is popular to encourage a tolerance toward contradictions in theology. Alister McGrath writes in his *Understanding Doctrine*:

The fact that something is paradoxical and even self-contradictory does not invalidate it...Those of us who have worked in the scientific field are only too aware of the sheer complexity and mysteriousness of reality. The events lying behind the rise of quantum theory, the difficulties of using models in scientific explanation – to name but two factors which I can remember particularly clearly from my own period as a natural scientist – point to the inevitability of paradox and contradiction in any except the most superficial engagement with reality...⁸

This is nonsense. Granting that McGrath knows science well enough to speak on the subject,⁹ this is a testimony against science, and not an argument for tolerating contradictions in theology. He assumes the reliability of science and judges all other disciplines by it. To paraphrase him, if there are contradictions in science, then contradictions must be acceptable, and one must tolerate them when it comes to theological reflection as well.

However, one reason to reject the reliability of science is precisely because it often contradicts itself. Science is a pragmatic discipline, useful for manipulating nature and advancing technology, but it cannot discover anything about reality. Knowledge about reality only comes from valid deductions from biblical revelation, and never from scientific or empirical methods.¹⁰ McGrath gives no argument for us to ignore or tolerate the contradictions in science; he just assumes the reliability of science despite the contradictions. But he gives no justification for doing this.

What makes science the ultimate standard by which we must judge all other disciplines? What gives science the right to make the rules for all other fields of study? McGrath states that science points "to the inevitability of paradox and contradiction in any except the most superficial engagement with reality." But science is not theology. Beyond "the most superficial engagement with reality" – although I deny the reliability of science even on such a level – science generates contradictions and crumbles, but this does not mean that theology suffers the same fate.

Theology deals with God, who has the right and power to govern all of life and thought. God knows the nature of reality, and communicates it to us through the Bible. Therefore,

⁸ Alister McGrath, *Understanding Doctrine*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990; p. 138.

⁹ He did his doctoral work in the field of molecular biophysics.

¹⁰ See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions*.

it is theology that makes the rules for science, and a biblical system of theology contains no paradoxes or contradictions.

Any proposition affirming one thing is by necessity also a denial of its opposite. To affirm X is to deny not-X, and to affirm not-X is to deny X. For the sake of simplicity, assume that the opposite of X is Y, so that $Y = \text{not-X}$. Then, to affirm X is to deny Y, and to affirm Y is to deny X. Or, $X = \text{not-Y}$, and $Y = \text{not-X}$. Since to affirm a proposition is to at the same time deny its opposite, to affirm X and Y at the same time is the equivalent of affirming not-Y and not-X. To affirm two contradictory propositions is in reality to deny both. But to affirm both not-Y and not-X is also to affirm X and Y, which again means to deny Y and X. And thus the whole operation becomes meaningless. It is impossible to affirm two contradictory propositions at the same time.

To affirm the proposition, "Adam is a man" (X), is to at the same time deny the contradictory proposition, "Adam is not a man" (Y, or not-X). Likewise, to affirm the proposition, "Adam is not a man" (Y), is to deny the contradictory proposition, "Adam is a man" (X). Now, to affirm both "Adam is a man" (X) and "Adam is not a man" (Y) does nothing more than to deny both propositions in reverse order. That is, it is equivalent to denying "Adam is not a man" (Y) and "Adam is a man" (X). But then this returns to affirming the two propositions in reverse order again. When we affirm both, we deny both; when we deny both, we affirm both. Affirming two contradictory propositions therefore generates no intelligible meaning at all. It is to say nothing.

Assume that divine sovereignty and human freedom are contradictory. Some theologians, claiming that the Bible teaches both, encourage their readers to affirm both. However, if to affirm divine sovereignty is to deny human freedom, and to affirm human freedom is to deny divine sovereignty, then to affirm both only means to reject both divine sovereignty (in the form of an affirmation of human freedom) and human freedom (in the form of an affirmation of divine sovereignty). In this example, since the Bible affirms divine sovereignty and denies human freedom, there is no contradiction – not even an apparent one.¹¹

On the other hand, when unbelievers allege that the incarnation of Christ entails a contradiction, which is the context for the above passage from McGrath, the Christian does not have the option to deny either the deity or the humanity of Christ. Rather, he must articulate and clarify the doctrine as the Bible teaches it, and show that there is no contradiction. The same applies for the doctrine of the Trinity.

It is futile to say that these doctrines are in perfect harmony in the mind of God, and only appear to be contradictions to human beings. As long as they remain contradictions, whether only in appearance or not, we cannot affirm both of them. And how can one distinguish between a real contradiction from an apparent one? If we must tolerate apparent contradictions, then we must tolerate all contradictions. Since without knowing the resolution, an apparent contradiction appears to be the same as a real one, to *know*

¹¹ See the relevant sections of this book that discuss the incarnation, the Trinity, and divine sovereignty vs. human freedom.

that a "contradiction" is only so in appearance means that one has already resolved it, and then the term no longer applies.

Scientists and unbelievers may wallow in contradictions, but Christians must not tolerate them. Rather than abandoning the unity of Scripture or the law of noncontradiction as a "defense" against those who accuse biblical doctrines of being contradictory, we must affirm and demonstrate the coherence of these doctrines. On the other hand, Christians should expose the incoherence of non-Christian beliefs, and challenge their adherents to abandon them.

THE INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE

Biblical infallibility follows by necessity from the inspiration and unity of Scripture. The Bible contains no errors; it is correct in whatever it asserts. Since God does not lie or err, and the Bible is his word, it follows that everything written in it must be true. Jesus says, "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35), and that "It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law" (Luke 16:17).

The INFALLIBILITY of Scripture refers to an inability to err – the Bible *cannot* err. INERRANCY, on the other hand, emphasizes that the Bible *does not* err. The former refers to the potential, while the latter addresses the actual state of affairs. Strictly speaking, *infallibility* is the stronger word, and it entails inerrancy, but sometimes the two are interchangeable in usage.

It is possible for a person to be fallible, but produces a text that is free from error. People who are capable of making mistakes nonetheless do not constantly err. However, there are those who reject the doctrine of inerrancy but at the same time desire to affirm the perfection of God and the Bible as his word, and as a result maintain the impossible position that the Bible is indeed infallible, but errant. Sometimes what they mean is that the Bible is infallible in one sense, perhaps as it relates to spiritual things, while it contains errors in another sense, perhaps as it relates to historical matters.

However, biblical statements about spiritual things are inseparably bound to biblical statements about history, so that it is impossible to affirm one while rejecting the other. For example, one cannot separate what Scripture says about the resurrection as a historical event and what it says about its spiritual meaning. If the resurrection did not happen as the Bible says it did, what it says about its spiritual significance cannot be true.

The challenge to those who reject biblical infallibility and inerrancy is that they have no authoritative epistemological principle by which to judge one part of Scripture to be accurate and another part to be inaccurate. Since Scripture is the only objective source of information from which the entire Christian system is constructed, one who considers any portion or aspect of Scripture as fallible or errant must reject the whole of Christianity. Again, this is because there is no higher epistemological principle to judge one part of Scripture to be right and another part to be wrong.

One cannot question or reject the ultimate authority of a system of thought and still claim allegiance to it, since the ultimate authority in any system defines the entire system. Once a person questions or rejects the ultimate authority of a system, he is no longer an adherent of the system, but rather one who adheres to the principle or authority by which he questions or rejects the ultimate authority of the system that he has just left behind. To have an ultimate authority other than the Scripture is to reject the Scripture, since the Bible itself claims infallibility and ultimacy. One who rejects biblical infallibility and inerrancy therefore assumes the intellectual stance of an unbeliever, and must proceed to defend and justify his personal worldview against the believer's arguments for the truth of the Christian faith.

Confusion permeates the present theological climate; therefore, it is best to affirm both biblical infallibility and inerrancy, and explain what we mean by these terms. God is infallible, and since the Bible is his word, it cannot and does not contain any errors. We affirm that the Bible is infallible in every sense of the term, and therefore it must also be inerrant in every sense of the term. The Bible cannot and does not contain any errors, whether it is speaking of spiritual, historical, or other matters. It is correct in all that it affirms.

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

We need to determine the extent of the Bible's authority in order to ascertain the level of control that it ought to have over our lives. The inspiration, unity, and infallibility of Scripture imply that it possesses absolute authority. Since the Scripture is the very word of God, or God speaking, the necessary conclusion is that it carries the authority of God. Therefore, the authority of Scripture is identical to the authority of God.

Biblical writers sometimes refer to God and Scripture as if the two are interchangeable. As Warfield writes, "God and the Scriptures are brought into such conjunction as to show that in point of directness of authority no distinction was made between them."¹²

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
(Genesis 12:1-3)

The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." (Galatians 3:8)

Then *the LORD* said to Moses, "Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, "This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me...But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might

¹² *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, Vol. 1*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2000 (original: 1932); p. 283.

show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth..." (Exodus 9:13-16)

For *the Scripture* says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (Romans 9:17)

While the Genesis passage says that it was "the Lord" who spoke to Abraham, Galatians says, "The Scripture foresaw...[The Scripture] announced..." The passage from Exodus states that it was "the Lord" who told Moses what to say to Pharaoh, but Romans says, "the Scripture says to Pharaoh..."

Since God possesses absolute and ultimate authority, the Bible also carries absolute and ultimate authority. Since there is no difference between God speaking and the Bible speaking, there is no difference between obeying God and obeying the Bible. To believe and obey the Bible is to believe and obey God; to disbelieve and disobey the Bible is to disbelieve and disobey God. The Bible is not just an instrument through which God speaks to us; rather, the words of the Bible are the very words that God is speaking – there is no difference. The Bible is God's voice to mankind, and the authority of Scripture is total.

THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Bible is necessary for precise and authoritative information about the things of God. Since theology is central to all of life and thought, Scripture is necessary as a foundation to all of human civilization. Those who reject biblical authority nevertheless continue to assume Christian presuppositions to govern their life and thought, although they refuse to admit this. One task of the Christian apologist is to expose the unbeliever's implicit assumption of biblical premises despite their explicit rejection of them. But to the extent that any worldview consistently excludes biblical premises, it degenerates into skepticism and barbarism.

Biblical infallibility is the only justifiable first principle from which one may deduce information about ultimate issues such as metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Knowledge belonging to subsidiary categories such as politics and mathematics are also limited to propositions deducible from biblical revelation. Without biblical infallibility as the starting point of one's thinking, knowledge is not possible at all; any other first principle fails to justify itself, and so a system that depends on it cannot even begin. For example, without a verbal revelation from God, there is no universal and authoritative reason to forbid murder and theft. The Bible is necessary for all meaningful propositions.

Scripture is necessary for defining every Christian concept and activity. It governs every aspect of the spiritual life, including preaching, prayer, worship, and guidance. Scripture is also necessary for salvation to be possible, since the information necessary for salvation is revealed in the Bible, and must be conveyed to the individual for him to receive salvation. Paul writes, "the holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

An earlier section of this book points out that all men know that the Christian God exists, and that he is the only God. Men are born with this knowledge. Although this knowledge is sufficient to render unbelief culpable, it is insufficient for salvation. One gains knowledge about the work of Christ either directly from Scripture, or indirectly through the preaching or writing of another.

Therefore, the Scripture is necessary for knowledge leading to salvation, instructions leading to spiritual growth, answers to the ultimate questions, and for any knowledge about reality. It is the necessary precondition for all knowledge.

THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE

There are two extremes regarding the clarity of Scripture that Christians must avoid. One maintains that the meaning of Scripture is totally obscure to the average person – only an elite and chosen group of individuals may interpret it. The other view claims that the Scripture is so clear that no part of it is difficult to understand, and that no training in hermeneutics is required to handle the text. By extension, the interpretation of a seasoned theologian is no more reliable than an untrained person's opinion.

The former position closes off the use of Scripture from the general populace, and prevents anyone from challenging the biblical understanding of the established professionals, even when they are mistaken.

The latter position is also dangerous. The Bible is not so easy to understand that every person can interpret it with equal competence. Even the apostle Peter, when referring to the writings of Paul, says, "His letters contain some things that are hard to understand." He warns that "ignorant and unstable people distort" the meaning of Paul's words, "as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

Many people would like to think of themselves as competent in important matters such as theology and hermeneutics, but instead of praying for wisdom and studying the Scripture, they assume that they are just as capable as the theologians or their own pastors. This way of thinking invites disaster and confusion. Diligence, training, and divine endowment all contribute to one's ability to interpret and apply the Bible.

Although many passages in the Bible are easy to understand, some of them require extra diligence and special wisdom to accurately interpret. It is possible for a person to read the Scripture and gain from it sufficient understanding and knowledge for salvation, although sometimes one may need help from an instructed believer even for this:

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:30-31)

It is also possible to learn the basic tenets of the Christian faith just by reading the Bible. But there are passages in the Bible that are, to differing degrees, difficult to understand. In those cases, one may enlist the assistance of ministers and theologians to explain the passages, so as to avoid distorting the word of God.

Nehemiah 8:8 affirms the place of the preaching ministry: "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read." However, the final authority rests in the words of Scripture themselves, and not in the interpretations of scholars. Scripture is never wrong, although our understanding of and inferences from it may at times be mistaken. This is why every church should train its members in theology, hermeneutics, and logic, so that they may better handle the word of truth.

Therefore, although the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture grants every person the right to read and interpret the Bible, it does not eliminate the need for teachers in the church, but rather affirms their necessity. Paul writes that one ministerial office God has established is that of the teacher, and he has appointed individuals to fulfill such a role (1 Corinthians 12:28). But James warns that not many should be eager to take up such an office: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1). In another place, Paul writes, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment..." (Romans 12:3).

Those chosen by God to be doctrinal ministers are able to interpret the more difficult passages in Scripture, and can also extract valuable insights that may elude others from the simpler passages as well. Ephesians 4:7-13 refers to this office as one of Christ's gifts to his church, and therefore Christians ought to value and respect those standing in such a ministry.

We live in a generation in which people despise authority; they detest being told what to do or believe.¹³ Most do not even respect biblical authority, let alone ecclesiastical authority. They consider their opinion just as good as that of the apostles, or at least the theologians or pastors; their religion is democratic, not authoritarian. But Scripture commands believers to obey their leaders: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:17). Every believer has the right to read the Bible for himself, but this must not translate into illegitimate defiance¹⁴ against the learned teaching of scholars or the authority of church leaders.

¹³ But of course they think this way only because they have been taught to do so.

¹⁴ Since there is no difference between obeying God and obeying Scripture, and since Scripture is our direct contact with the revealed will of God, the immediate object of our allegiance is the Bible (Acts 17:11), by which we may test the teachings and practices of those with learning and authority in the church. Therefore, teachings and practices that deny scriptural doctrines, such as biblical infallibility and Christ's resurrection, constitute sufficient grounds for defying authority. "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29).

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

Many Christians claim to affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, but their actual thinking and practice deny it. The doctrine affirms that the Bible contains sufficient information for one not only to find salvation in Christ, but afterward to receive instruction and guidance in every aspect of life and thought, either by the explicit statements of Scripture, or by necessary inferences from it.

The Bible contains all that is necessary to construct a comprehensive Christian worldview that enables us to have a true view of reality.¹⁵ The Scripture conveys to us not only the will of God in the general matters of Christian faith and conduct, but by applying biblical precepts, we can also know his will in our specific and personal decisions. Everything that we need to know as Christians is found in the Bible, whether we are functioning at home, work, or church.

Paul writes that the Scripture is not only divine in origin, but that it is also comprehensive in scope:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be *thoroughly* equipped for *every* good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The necessary implication is that extra-biblical means of guidance such as visions and prophecies are unnecessary, although God may still provide them when he pleases.

Problems occur when Christians hold a position that amounts to a denial of the Scripture's sufficiency in providing comprehensive instruction and guidance. Some complain that the Bible lacks specific information one needs to make personal decisions; however, in light of Paul's words, it must be that the fault rests on these individuals, and not that the Bible is insufficient.

Those who deny the sufficiency of Scripture lack the information they need because of their spiritual immaturity and negligence. The Bible is indeed sufficient to guide them, but they neglect to study it. Some also exhibit strong rebellion and impiety. Although the Bible addresses their situations, they refuse to submit to its commands and instructions. Or, they refuse to accept the very method of receiving guidance from Scripture altogether, and demand that God guides them through visions, dreams, and prophecies when he has given them what they need through the Bible.

When God does not grant their illegitimate demands for extra-biblical guidance, some even decide to seek it through forbidden methods, such as astrology, divination, and other occult practices. Their rebellion is such that if God does not provide the desired

¹⁵ See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions*, for a system of apologetics that is consistent with the sufficiency of Scripture. Although it permits the use of extra-biblical arguments for certain purposes, it does not require them; rather, it affirms that the Bible is sufficient for both defense and offense when confronting any non-biblical worldview.

information in the ways prescribed by them, they are determined to obtain it from the devil.

Knowledge of God's will does not come from extra-biblical guidance, but an intellectual grasp and application of Scripture.¹⁶ The apostle Paul writes:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

Christian theology must affirm without reservation the sufficiency of Scripture as a comprehensive source of information, instruction, and guidance. The Bible contains the whole will of God, including the information one needs for salvation, spiritual development, and personal guidance. It contains sufficient information so that, if one were to fully obey it, he would be fulfilling the will of God in every detail of life. But he commits sin to the extent that he fails to obey Scripture. Although our obedience will never attain perfection in this life, it remains that there is no information that we require to live a perfect Christian life that is not already in the Bible.

¹⁶ See Vincent Cheung, "Biblical Guidance and Decision-Making," *Godliness with Contentment*.

3. GOD

Just as biblical infallibility is the epistemological foundation of the Christian faith, the doctrine of God is the metaphysical foundation on which other biblical doctrines depend. Therefore, the Christian must strive to attain a correct understanding of God. This chapter deals with the existence, attributes, and works of God.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The Bible says that he who comes to God must believe that he exists (Hebrews 11:6). It is impossible for one who denies God's existence to develop a relationship with him or to consciously serve him.¹ I will introduce two categories of arguments for the existence of God. We may call the first type the traditional or classical theistic arguments, which various theologians and philosophers have favored in demonstrating the existence of God. The second type consists of arguments derived from Scripture itself, and so we may call them biblical arguments.

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT argues from the idea of God to his necessary existence. God is by definition the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and since the being than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot lack the very property of being, God must exist by necessity.

Succeeding Lanfranc, Anselm (1033-1109) became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093. His *Cur Deus Homo* and other works have exercised profound influence on the development of Christian theology. However, he is perhaps most famous for his ontological argument as articulated in his *Proslogion*.² The following reproduces the argument in part:

Now we believe that You are something than which nothing greater can be thought. Or can it be that a thing of such a nature does not exist, since "the Fool has said in his heart, there is no God"? But surely, when this same Fool hears what I am speaking about, namely, "something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought," he understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his mind, even if he does not understand that it actually exists....

Even the Fool, then, is forced to agree that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the mind, since he

¹ Since God controls every detail of his creation, even those who deny his existence think and act only as God wills, and in this sense they "serve" the purposes of God. However, these individuals are unaware of God's control over them, and thus perceive themselves to be autonomous. Their thoughts and actions, all decreed by God, lead to perdition and not salvation.

² Alvin Plantinga is a recent proponent of a version of the ontological argument.

understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood is in the mind. And surely that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. If then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in the mind alone, this same that-than-which-a-greater-*cannot*-be-thought is that-than-which-a-greater-*can*-be-thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists both in the mind and in reality.

And certainly this being so truly exists that it cannot be even thought not to exist. For something can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist, and this is greater than that which can be thought not to exist. Hence, if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist, then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not the same as that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, which is absurd. Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists so truly then, that it cannot be even thought not to exist.

And You, Lord our God, are this being. You exist so truly, Lord my God, that You cannot even be thought not to exist....In fact, everything else there is, except You alone, can be thought of as not existing. You alone, then, of all things most truly exist and therefore of all things possess existence to the highest degree; for anything else does not exist as truly, and so possesses existence to a lesser degree. Why then did "the Fool say in his heart, there is no God" when it is so evident to any rational mind that You of all things exist to the highest degree? Why indeed, unless because he was stupid and a fool?

...No one, indeed, understanding what God is can think that God does not exist, even though he may say these words in his heart either without any signification or with some peculiar signification. For God is that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought. Whoever really understands this understands clearly that this same being so exists that not even in thought can it not exist. Thus whoever understands that God exists in such a way cannot think of Him as not existing.³

Many people's first reaction is to object that just because a being is conceivable or exists in the mind does not mean that it must also exist in reality. One may conceive of a perfect car, but that does not mean it exists other than in his mind. A flying horse is conceivable, but this tells us nothing as to whether it exists in reality.

³ *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford World's Classics); Oxford University Press, 1998; p. 87-89. Paragraph divisions and punctuations modified for readability.

Such an objection betrays a misunderstanding of the ontological argument, which does not state that whatever is conceivable also exists in reality, but that God cannot be conceived except as one that exists; otherwise, what is conceived would not be God. If a person conceives in his mind a being than which nothing greater can be conceived that does not exist, then he is in fact not thinking of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Since the argument refers to a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and not just any object conceivable by the mind, the objection is irrelevant.

Ambiguity exists concerning what it means for something to exist "in reality." We may agree that what exists in the mind does not necessarily exist in the physical world, but this is again irrelevant to the argument because God is incorporeal; he is not a physical being. When we affirm that once the idea of God is present in the mind, he must also be understood to exist, we do not say that he must be understood to exist as physical matter.

And thus the concept of existence itself poses a problem. In some sense, anything can be said to exist – even unicorns, dreams, and mathematical equations, although they do not exist as physical objects. However, unicorns did not create the universe, dreams did not predestinate some men to salvation and others to perdition, and mathematical equations did not take up human flesh to die as a ransom for many.

Some theologians and philosophers suggest that perhaps we should not be asking, "Does God exist?" Instead, a more intelligible question is, "What is God?" Even Zeus "exists," but only in mythology. The Christian God is not a physical object, but neither is he like dreams, equations, or Zeus. Rather, he is the creator and ruler of the universe, who decrees our history and decides our destiny, and who deserves and demands our worship. It is not a problem to say that God "exists" insofar as this represents an affirmation of all that the Bible says about him, and not that he is a physical object or mythological character.

THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT argues from contingent effects to the existence of the first cause, or the creator God. The argument may begin from self-consciousness or the existence of the physical universe.⁴ Everything that has a beginning – everything that comes into being – is an effect, and thus must have a cause. The universe must then have a cause if it has a beginning. The universe indeed has a beginning, and therefore it must have a cause. An infinite regression of causes is impossible; therefore, there must be a first cause that has no beginning, but that is necessary and eternal. This being we acknowledge to be God. We will now discuss the premises.

We begin by affirming self-consciousness or the existence of the universe. It is self-refuting to doubt one's own existence, since one must first exist before he can deny his own existence. One who does not exist cannot affirm the proposition, "I do not exist." Also, a person who denies his own existence withdraws from the debate, and therefore poses no threat to the cosmological argument. Once we have established the proposition, "I exist" or "The universe exists," the argument can begin.

⁴ To begin with self-consciousness is to begin with the proposition, "I exist."

Uncaused contingent beings and events are impossible, since something cannot come out of nothing. Since nothing is not something, it cannot produce anything. Only a being that has no beginning can be uncaused. Neither is it possible for there to be self-caused beings and events. A cause must precede an effect – at least logically, if not chronologically. Thus the cause exists before its effect. If a being or event already exists, then it does not cause its own existence, since it already exists. This being or event must then either be uncaused, or produced by a prior cause.

Although an infinite progression of causes is possible, an infinite regression of causes is not. An infinite progression can occur since causes can continue to lead to new effects, and it is logically possible that this process will never end. However, if we were to assume an infinite regression of causes, then it is impossible for us to have reached the present, since it is impossible to travel across an actual infinite.

Just as it is impossible to reach the end of an infinite progression, our present is an "end" as seen from the past. Any particular moment is an "end" or stopping point as seen from the past, so that if the past is infinite, we could never have reached the present; otherwise, the past would not be infinite, but finite.

For example, if one were to begin counting at noon on Monday and decide that he would stop at noon on Friday, he would reach the stopping point when the time arrives. But if there is infinite time between his starting point and his stopping point, then he would never reach the stopping point. Likewise, if a man runs toward a finish line – a designated "end" analogous to our present – he would never reach it if there is an infinite distance between the starting point and the stopping point; otherwise, the distance between the two points would not be infinite, but finite.

Therefore, an infinite regression of past causes for the universe is impossible, since if the past is infinite, we would never have reached the present; otherwise, the past would not be infinite, but finite. On the other hand, if the universe has a starting point in the finite past, then it would be possible to arrive at the present. But if the universe has a starting point, then it must have a cause. Some people challenge: "Why must this cause be God?" This is a foolish objection, since God is just the name or title of this first cause. The argument shows that there must be a creator who made this universe.

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) is best known for his "Five Ways" of demonstrating the existence of God.⁵ Here we will reproduce only the second and third from his *Summa Theologica*:

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not

⁵ Modern proponents of cosmological arguments include Norman Geisler and William Lane Craig.

possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or one only. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence – which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.⁶

Some have recently attempted to assert an uncaused or eternal universe based on quantum theory, but their arguments at most only push the question one step backward so that the existence of the universe still requires an explanation, or a cause. None of them show that the universe is uncaused or eternal, or that something can come out of nothing. Besides, there are strong disagreements among scientists as to the implications of quantum theory, and arguments of this sort often misapply scientific speculations.

If the immediate cause of the universe itself requires a cause, then we still have not arrived at the first cause. There must be a cause to explain every cause that is also an effect, but infinite regress is impossible, so there must be an uncaused first cause that is

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*; P. 1, Q. 2, A. 3. Translation by Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

eternal, that had always existed, and that had created time itself. Since no effect can be uncaused, this first cause has no beginning, and is thus not an effect.

This argument is invulnerable to the challenge, "If everything has a cause, then God must also have a cause." This typical objection betrays a lack of attentiveness, since the argument states only that every effect, or everything that comes into being, must have a cause. But the argument shows that God is not an effect, but is the uncaused first cause.

THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT may also be called the argument from design. It is historically associated with the work of William Paley,⁷ who argued as follows:

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer, that, for anything I knew to the contrary, it had lain there forever; nor would it, perhaps, be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given – that, for anything I knew, the watch might have always been there.

Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, viz., that, when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, e.g. that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that, if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, if a different size from what they are, or placed after any other manner, or in any other order than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it....

...the inference, we think, is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker; that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use....

Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art, in the

⁷ Modern proponents of design arguments include Michael Behe and William Dembski.

complexity, subtlety, and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible do they go beyond them in number and variety; yet in a multitude of cases, are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end, or suited to their office, than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity...⁸

Ordinary observations and scientific studies indicate that the physical universe exhibits an intricate structure and complex order; it presents itself as a product of deliberate design. THE ANTHROPIC PRINCIPLE represents the observation that many aspects of the universe seem to be fine-tuned to permit the existence of life. If these factors were to be even slightly different than what they are, life would be impossible. A large number of precise conditions must be present simultaneously to permit the existence of organic life.

Since what is designed requires a designer, the observed design of the universe necessitates the existence of a designer. This being exhibits the characteristics of a rational mind, capable of thought and planning, and possesses such power to execute his intentions that he created the universe with no preexisting matter available. This description is consistent with what the Bible teaches about God. The magnitude and complexity of his creation demonstrate his power and wisdom:

But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding. (Jeremiah 10:12)

With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. (Jeremiah 27:5)

How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. (Psalm 104:24)

THE MORAL ARGUMENT argues from objective moral laws to a giver of moral laws. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) writes in his *Critique of Practical Reason*:⁹

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.¹⁰

⁸ William Paley, *Natural Theology* (1802), as cited in *The Existence of God*, edited by John Hick; New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1964; p. 99-103. Paragraph divisions and punctuations modified for readability.

⁹ In more recent times, Kant's effort was emulated by C. S. Lewis, albeit with a different formulation and agenda.

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*; New York: Macmillan, 1956; p. 166.

To make sense of objective moral laws there must be justice. Since we observe that justice is often not served in this life, there must be an afterlife where precise justice is rendered. Moreover, for there to be justice there must be a Judge who will deliver such justice. But for this Judge to judge rightly, he must be omniscient, knowing every thought and deed, and their various relationships. And to execute justice, there must be unlimited power at the Judge's disposal.

Now, Kant had argued for the concept of God as a heuristic principle in ethics, and did not mean for the argument to serve as a proof in the classical sense:

By a postulate of pure practical reason, I understand a theoretical proposition which is not as such demonstrable, but which is an inseparable corollary of an *a priori* unconditionally valid practical law.¹¹

Nevertheless, if one denies that there is an afterlife in which everyone must face this all-knowing and all-powerful Judge, he can no longer account for object morality. Yet we find men everywhere speak and act as though objective morality exists. Even those who verbally deny objective morality react to the actions of others as if such a thing exists. One cannot consistently affirm objective morality, either by word or action, and reject its necessary precondition. Hastings Rashdall writes:

The belief in God...is the logical presupposition of an "objective" or absolute Morality. A moral ideal can exist nowhere and nohow but in a mind; an absolute ideal can exist only in a Mind from which all Reality is derived. Our moral ideal can only claim objective reality in so far as it can rationally be regarded as the revelation of a moral ideal eternally existing in the mind of God.¹²

Concluding our discussion of the classical arguments, we will now proceed to examine the biblical arguments, called such because of their dependence on both the apologetic strategy and actual content of the Bible.

THE TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENT, sometimes called an abductive argument, argues from a known or acknowledged Y to a necessary precondition X. Or, as Robert Stern explains:

As standardly presented, transcendental arguments are usually said to be distinctive in involving a certain sort of claim, namely that "For Y to be possible, X must be the case," where Y is some indisputable fact about us and our mental life (e.g. that we have experiences, use language, make certain judgments, have certain

¹¹ Ibid., 127.

¹² Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*; Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1907; II, p. 212.

concepts, perform certain actions, etc.), but where it is left open at this stage exactly what is substituted for X.¹³

One aspect of the biblical system of apologetics involves arguing that given any Y, the necessary precondition (X) is the entire biblical worldview. For example, among other things, science assumes the uniformity of nature (Y), but such an assumption demands the biblical worldview (X);¹⁴ therefore, the biblical worldview is a necessary presupposition that makes science possible. The implication is that science can never disprove the Scripture, or even argue against it.

Biblical teaching generates a particular type of transcendental argument¹⁵ that is irrefutable, since in the process of argumentation it shows that the biblical worldview (X) is applicable to any Y at all. Whatever is substituted for Y in the context of debate, the biblical worldview (X) is its necessary precondition. This is true even concerning arguments against Christianity – without the biblical worldview as the presupposition, no objection against Christianity is even intelligible.¹⁶ But once the entire Bible is already acknowledged as true, no objection against it can be true.

This is a positive indirect argument for the biblical worldview. A biblical strategy of apologetics should employ both direct and indirect arguments.¹⁷ What follows, then, is a positive direct argument for the Christian faith, which I call THE DOGMATICAL ARGUMENT.¹⁸

The word "dogmatic" has some very unfavorable connotations in colloquial speech. One dictionary defines "dogmatism" as "positiveness in assertion of opinion especially when unwarranted or arrogant; a viewpoint or system of ideas based on insufficiently examined premises," and a "dogma" is "a point of view or tenet put forth as authoritative without adequate grounds."¹⁹ Although this reflects common usage, it is not what we mean.

"Dogmatic" can simply mean "doctrinal"²⁰ or "based on a priori principles, not on induction."²¹ Both of these definitions are applicable in our context. The synonyms of this word include, "dictatorial, authoritative, magisterial," and in another sense, "deductive, a priori, deducible, derivable, and reasoned."²² The whole of the Christian Scripture is a

¹³ Robert Stern, *Transcendental Arguments and Scepticism*; New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2000; p. 6.

¹⁴ I have argued for this premise elsewhere. Here I am interested only in explaining the nature and use of the biblical strategy of apologetics.

¹⁵ See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions*.

¹⁶ See Vincent Cheung, "The Problem of Evil," *The Light of Our Minds*.

¹⁷ For examples and explanations of both types, see Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions and The Light of Our Minds*.

¹⁸ Alternatively, we may call it "The Presuppositional Argument" or "The Revelational Argument."

¹⁹ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*; Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2001.

²⁰ *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition*; IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 2000.

²¹ *The Oxford American Dictionary of Current English*; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

²² *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus*. The term "dogmatic theology" is the general equivalent of "systematic theology" in theological usage.

revelation from God. And since God speaks by an absolute and "dictatorial"²³ authority, his verbal revelation forms the precondition of all of life and thought, and any knowledge only comes from valid deductions from it.

In his *God and Reason*, Ed. L. Miller explains very well the philosophical position of dogmatism:

One of the distinctive features of the Judeo-Christian tradition is its belief in a divine self-disclosure: God has intervened in human history and spoken; he has unveiled himself in a "special revelation." And the knowledge of God drawn from this revelation is an example of revealed theology. Such theology is sometimes called "dogmatic" (in the best sense of the word) or "confessional" theology because it seeks to elucidate the divinely bestowed articles of faith (dogmas) that it takes as its fundamental and nonnegotiable data. Not unlike the mathematician, the dogmatic theologian begins with certain givens, though in this case *revealed* givens; the system is bounded by revelation, self-contained, and offered as a package deal.²⁴

The Christian system takes biblical infallibility, or the proposition, "The Bible is the word of God," as its self-authenticating first principle. By self-authenticating, I do not mean that the Bible verifies itself in our experience (although it does), since if it is by our experience that the Bible proves to be true, it would not be *self*-authenticating. Neither am I referring to the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit that the Bible is true, although this happens to those chosen by God for salvation. Rather, I mean that the content of the Bible verifies itself; it needs not appeal to any premises external to itself.

From this first principle of biblical infallibility, the rest of the system follows by necessity through valid deductions. Since the first principle verifies itself to be true, any propositions validly deduced from it is also true. Since biblical revelation condemns all other systems of thought, and whatever it says is true, the Christian faith is therefore the only true system of thought, by which every proposition is evaluated and made intelligible.

The method is similar to rationalism. Although its tenacious use of deduction is commendable, non-Christian rationalism fails because its first principles are arbitrary and unjustified. On the other hand, the Bible contains the content to justify itself as the infallible first principle of the Christian faith. But dogmatism is perhaps the better name,²⁵ since it conveys the idea that the biblical worldview consists of, in the words of Miller, self-contained revealed givens offered as a package deal.

²³ As in, "imposing one's will or opinions on others"; *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.

²⁴ Ed. L. Miller, *God and Reason, Second Edition*; New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972, 1995; p. 9.

²⁵ Alternatively, we may call the method "biblical rationalism," "biblical foundationalism," or "presuppositionalism."

Everyone has a worldview – a network of interrelated propositions the sum of which forms "a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world."²⁶ There is a starting point or first principle to every worldview from which the rest of the system is derived. It is not possible for a worldview to be a web of propositions that depend on one another without a first principle, since even such a conception of a worldview requires an epistemological justification. Also, it would remain that some beliefs are more central to the web, the failure of which destroys the propositions farther from the center of the web. Even the most central claims require justification, and a worldview in which the propositions depend on one another in a way that lacks a first principle or ultimate authority is exposed as having no justification at all.

Therefore, every worldview requires a first principle or ultimate authority. Being first or ultimate, such a principle cannot be justified by any prior or greater authority; otherwise, it would not be the first or ultimate. The first principle must then possess the content to justify itself. For example, the proposition, "All knowledge comes from sense experience," fails to be a first principle on which a worldview can be constructed, since if all knowledge comes from sense experience, this proposed principle must also be known only by sense experience, but prior to proving the principle, the reliability of sense experience has not yet been established. Thus, the principle results in a vicious circle, and self-destructs. It matters not what may be validly deduced from such a principle – if the system cannot even begin, what follows from the principle cannot be accepted.

A worldview that begins with a contradiction is impossible, and must be rejected. This is because contradictions are unintelligible and meaningless. The law of contradiction²⁷ states that "A is not non-A," or that something cannot be true and not true at the same time and in the same sense. A denial of this law must itself employ it to be meaningful. If truth can be contradictory, then truth cannot be contradictory, dogs are cats, elephants are rats, and "See Jane run" means "I am married." If it is not true that "A is not non-A," nothing is intelligible.

Since no legitimate first principle can contradict itself, epistemological skepticism, being contradictory, must be ruled out. A philosophical skeptic maintains that "no knowledge is possible...or that there is not sufficient or adequate evidence to tell if any knowledge is possible."²⁸ He either claims to know that nothing can be known, or to know that there is inadequate evidence to know anything. Both options claim and deny absolute knowledge at the same time, and are therefore self-contradictory.

Self-contradictory first principles are untenable, and skepticism is self-contradictory. This means that an adequate first principle must guarantee the possibility of knowledge. In addition, this first principle must yield an adequate amount of knowledge, and not merely

²⁶ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*; Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2001; "weltanschauung." *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, Second Edition*: "A worldview constitutes an overall perspective on life that sums up what we know about the world..."; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001; "Wilhelm Dilthey," p. 236.

²⁷ Or, the law of noncontradiction.

²⁸ *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, "Skeptics," p. 850.

make knowledge possible. Even if "My name is Vincent" is a true statement, it does not yield any information about the origin of the universe, or whether stealing is immoral. It does not even define morality. But how do I know that the proposition is true in the first place? It does not have a self-contained and self-justifying epistemology in its content. A principle is therefore inadequate that fails to provide information concerning necessary categories of thought such as epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.

A first principle cannot be based on induction, which reasons from particulars to universals.²⁹ No amount of empirical investigation can tell me, for example, that "Every human being has a brain." To establish a general proposition such as this, I must examine every human being. And while examining human beings in one part of the world, I must somehow ensure that the nature of man has not changed in those parts of the world whose human beings I have already studied. If I intend to apply the claim to all human beings in the past and the future, I must also examine all the human beings in the past and the future. Since this is impossible, inductive reasoning and empirical methods cannot justify the proposition.

On the basis of empirical methods, it would be impossible to define a human being in the first place, since that concept is also a universal. Similar problems are inherent in establishing a proposition such as "All men are mortal." Some seek to rescue induction by saying that, although it cannot conclusively establish any proposition, at least it can establish a claim as probable. However, if probability is "the ratio of the number of outcomes in an exhaustive set of equally likely outcomes that produce a given event to the total number of possible outcomes,"³⁰ even if we grant that empirical methods can discover the numerator of the fraction – although I deny even this to empiricism – to determine the denominator requires knowledge of a universal, and omniscience is required to establish it in many cases. Since empirical methods cannot know universals, to say that it can come to probable knowledge is nonsense.

Induction is always a formal fallacy, and a system based on an empirical principle cannot succeed. Deduction, on the other hand, produces conclusions that are guaranteed to be true if the premises are true, and if the process of reasoning is valid. Rationalism employs deduction, and as such is superior to empirical methods. Rationalistic systems appear to be less popular, but we will point out some of its difficulties before proceeding.

Rationalism selects a first principle and from it deduces the rest of the system, much like how one begins with one or more axioms in geometry. If the first principle is true, and the process of deductive reasoning is valid, the subsidiary propositions, or theorems, would all be true by necessity. The problem with non-revelational rationalism is how one may select a first principle.³¹ Now, if the axiom selected is self-contradictory, then it is of

²⁹ Induction is always a formal fallacy since it yields conclusions that say more than what the premises permit.

³⁰ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*; "probability."

³¹ As Miller says, the mathematician (and also the rationalist) begins with certain givens, but the dogmatic theologian begins with *revealed* givens – that is, information provided by an omniscient God.

course rejected. But assuming that a non-contradictory principle is selected, it must still justify itself.

Only the Christian first principle is self-justifying, but even if we assume that a number of self-consistent and self-justifying principles exist, they must be broad enough to render knowledge possible. So to posit "My name is Vincent" as the first principle in a deductive worldview would result in the failure mentioned earlier. Finally, there are various schools of rationalistic systems, and their starting points are different and incompatible. Which one is correct? A rationalistic worldview with an arbitrary first principle cannot succeed. Although the result is no better, the method itself is still superior to the inductive procedure.

By this point, all non-Christian systems have already failed, including the alleged revelation of Islam.³² They cannot satisfy all the requirements thus far listed. However, for the sake of completeness, we must also mention that the propositions within a worldview may not contradict one another. A first principle must not produce a proposition in politics that contradicts another proposition in ethics. I trust that there is no need to recite again the problems with contradictions.

The present apologetic strategy begins with the recognition that Christianity is the only deductive system with a self-consistent and self-justifying first principle revealed by an almighty omniscient being. The principle is broad enough to yield an adequate number of propositions sufficient to construct a complete worldview that entails no self-contradiction. Therefore, the biblical worldview is the precondition of intelligibility, knowledge, and truth. All other systems of thought cannot make knowledge possible and thus collapse into philosophical skepticism. But since skepticism is self-contradictory, one cannot remain in such a position, and Christianity is the only way out of the epistemological abyss.³³

What the classical arguments for the existence of God do not accomplish is to provide positive proof of the entire biblical worldview. Each only argues for the truth of several biblical propositions, such as God as the creator, God as the designer, or God as the giver of moral laws. However, the dogmatical argument simultaneously proves all biblical propositions and all of their logical implications. If the entire Bible is true, then of course the biblical God exists, and any other concept of God is automatically excluded.

A more serious objective defect of the classical theistic arguments is their dependence on science and empiricism.³⁴ If science and empiricism are fatally flawed as means to discover the nature of reality, any argument that relies on them fails before it even begins, although in the case of the theistic arguments, we seem to attain the proper conclusion.

³² A system may claim to be a divine revelation, but can it survive scrutiny? Besides the self-contradictory claims of Islam, the Koran at some points acknowledge the Christian Bible, but then makes claims contradictory to it, and thus the entire religion self-destructs.

³³ Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions*.

³⁴ But this may not be a defect from the unbeliever's viewpoint, and this is why the classical arguments are able to turn his presuppositions, faulty as they are, against his own position. That is, even if we assume our opponent's false premises, he is still mistaken, and Christianity is still vindicated.

That is, science may affirm the existence of God, but I reject the reliability of science even though I affirm the existence of God.

Nevertheless, the theistic arguments remain useful as a type of *ad hominem* arguments,³⁵ where one employs premises assumed by the unbeliever, and from them reasons to either absurd conclusions, thus demonstrating the falsity of the unbeliever's premises, or to conclusions favorable to the believer, such as the existence of God.³⁶ The theistic arguments are capable of showing the rational superiority and exclusivity of the Christian faith even when one assumes the false premise that scientific and empirical methods are reliable, or can discover truth.³⁷ Although they do not rest upon an infallible foundation, they are useful as the part of apologetics that defeats the unbeliever on his own territory. However, an infallible argument for Christianity, or for that matter any infallible argument, requires the infallible revelation of God as its starting point.³⁸

Proverbs 26:4-5 teaches two principles of argumentation that help summarize the biblical strategy of apologetics:

1. "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself."
2. "Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes."

The fool trusts in science and empiricism.³⁹ He thinks that his finite mind and flawed methodology can discover the truth about reality, that he needs no divine revelation, and that he can gain knowledge through autonomous investigation and reasoning. Verse 4 warns the believer not to reason like the fool, so as to avoid becoming like him. From the infallible foundation of God's verbal revelation, we can deduce an infallible and comprehensive system of truth and knowledge. This is the positive aspect of the biblical strategy of apologetics, and it consists of both direct and indirect arguments, both deductive and abductive reasoning.⁴⁰

³⁵ This is not the fallacy of irrelevant personal attack, but a case of turning the opponent's premises against his own position.

³⁶ Also, the historical reliability of the Bible, the resurrection of Christ, or the superiority of biblical ethics.

³⁷ Since science is constantly changing, perhaps the modern versions of the classical arguments are more useful against contemporary opponents, whereas the dogmatical argument requires no revision. It is often said that science is progressive and that it will continue to progress. This is a tacit admission that science has never been right and that it will never be right. The Bible has been correct in all that it affirms since it was first written; no change or "progress" is needed in its content.

³⁸ By revelation, I refer only to the words of Scripture, and not to charismatic intuitions, visions, dreams, and prophecies – these have their own epistemological difficulties and are not infallible.

³⁹ I only use science and empiricism to represent the unbeliever's source of information since they are favored by the modern man. Other methods of discovering truth, such as non-Christian rationalism or non-biblical religious texts, are just as vulnerable to our arguments.

⁴⁰ The transcendental argument is an indirect argument for the necessity of what the dogmatical argument directly demonstrates.

However, without becoming like the fool in our thinking, we may temporarily assume the premises he holds, merely for the sake of argument, to see where they lead.⁴¹ We may contend that it is foolish to trust in science as a means to discover the truth about reality, but then we may also show that scientific discoveries favor the Christian faith more than any other worldview, and at the same time inflict damage upon secular values and beliefs. We may formulate historical arguments against our opponent, while knowing that his method of historical investigation precludes any knowledge of history in the first place.⁴² This is the negative aspect of the biblical strategy of apologetics, and it often includes arguments using scientific and empirical premises.

This dual strategy of argumentation works against all non-Christian systems of thought, including non-biblical religions.⁴³ Since the Bible is true, and since it condemns all other religions, then all non-biblical religions are declared false by the same infallible authority of God that declares the Bible to be true. Anyone who challenges this must disprove the Bible, at which point the believer may employ the dogmatical argument and the transcendental argument to defend his faith and to continue tearing down his opponent's position.

We may demonstrate our opponent's religion to be self-contradictory, and that some of the ethical values he treasures can only be accounted for by the biblical worldview. For example, the ethics of Buddhism lacks any authoritative foundation; it is arbitrary. And if the opposing religion affirms the secular method of historical investigation, we may then use its findings to expose the historical errors of their doctrines, such as in the Koran and the Book of Mormon.

In this manner, the Christian apologist skillfully uses both positive and negative argumentation to defend his faith, while he confounds and refutes his opponent. As the apostle Paul writes:

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

Peter admonishes his readers: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). And Jude says, "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." It is the duty of every Christian to defend his faith and to destroy his

⁴¹ As Paul says, "I am speaking as a fool" (2 Corinthians 11:21).

⁴² The only infallible source of historical knowledge is biblical revelation, and our knowledge of history is limited to what it reveals. Secular knowledge in any area can never rise above the status of unjustified conjecture.

⁴³ It poses no difficulty to the biblical strategy of apologetics whether the opponent's position is atheism, agnosticism, communism, nihilism, Buddhism, Mormonism, Islam, or some other system of thought. The method of argumentation is the same, with only slight modifications to direct the arguments against the thinking of the immediate opponent.

opponent's beliefs. The biblical strategy elucidated above, with the dogmatical argument as its central thrust, equips the believer to "demolish arguments" and "take captive every thought" even when confronting the most crafty and hostile enemies of the biblical faith.

How are we to regard the non-Christian? Psalm 14:1 states, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Now, the Bible would not call one a fool who rejects Zeus, Allah, or the Buddha as false gods, since it is protective of only the God that it reveals. Therefore, the fool in Psalm 14 is not just one who rejects any deity, but one who rejects the God revealed in Scripture – that is, the biblical or Christian God. And since there is only one Christian God, Psalm 14 is not calling only the atheist a fool, but anyone who rejects Christianity, even though he may belong to another religion.

Romans 1:22-25 confirms this: "Although they claimed to be wise, *they became fools* and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles...They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator..." So the Bible calls any non-Christian a fool, whether he is an atheist, agnostic, Buddhist or Muslim. Psalm 53:2 implies that anyone who does not seek after God⁴⁴ lacks understanding: "God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God." Verse 4 says that the "workers of iniquity" have "no knowledge" (KJV).

On the other hand, the Scripture affirms that, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (Psalm 111:10). Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Since the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and the Bible acknowledges only the biblical or Christian God, the implication is that non-Christians have not even started to gain wisdom. It is not that they have only a little wisdom, but that they have not even started to have any wisdom at all.

In addition, the Bible says it is because of their "wickedness" that men "suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18) concerning the existence and nature of God, even though he has given them an inescapable revelation about himself through the innate knowledge of their minds and the words of Scripture. Paul comments that these individuals "neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21-22).

Thus, the biblical assessment of all non-Christians is that they are both foolish and wicked. Every non-Christian is intellectually and morally defective; it is unscriptural to consider any non-Christian as intelligent or moral. They demonstrate their lack of intellectual aptitude in failing to assent to the Christian faith, and to assent to it in its entirety. And in denying Christianity despite the innate knowledge God has placed in their minds and the irrefutable arguments of biblical apologetics, they show themselves to be not only intellectual ostriches but active suppressers of the truth about God. This is wickedness at its worst. Paul writes, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven

⁴⁴ That is, again, the Christian God – the only God that biblical revelation acknowledges.

against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Romans 1:18).

We who are now Christians were at one time also "alienated from God and were enemies in [our] minds" (Colossians 1:21), but God has reconciled us to himself through Christ (v. 22). But non-Christians are "separate from Christ...without hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). Paul writes that, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel" (2 Corinthians 4:4), and the preaching of the gospel is to "open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith" (Acts 26:18).

Although the Bible describes the unbelievers as living in a pitiful state of existence, we who have believed were also in such a condition. If left to ourselves, we would have remained in ignorance and darkness. It is by the election of God and through hearing the gospel that we were enlightened to the truth, and brought to faith in Christ. Therefore, by saying that unbelievers are fools, we do not mean that those who are now Christians have always been wise and enlightened, but it is only by the sovereign choice of God that we have been saved from a state of stupidity and futility. We are not Christians because we were wise, but we were made wise because God chose us to be Christians. Knowing this, Christians should not be arrogant, but should be grateful to God for their salvation.

Nevertheless, it remains that the Bible characterizes all unbelievers as foolish and wicked. Christians are thus obligated to view non-Christians as intellectually and morally inferior. Some may think that this is an overly unkind assessment. This may be true from the viewpoint of the unbelievers, but Christians must not think like them. Since the Bible teaches that unbelievers are foolish and wicked, and to be a Christian is to believe the whole Bible, then to be a Christian is also to believe that all unbelievers are foolish and wicked. Therefore, we should without reservation say with Anselm, "Why then did 'the Fool say in his heart, there is no God'...unless because he was stupid and a fool?"

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The divine attributes are the characteristics of God the sum of which defines who he is. The first issue to settle is the KNOWABILITY of God. If God is greater than human beings both in degree and in kind, then the question arises as to whether we may acquire reliable information about him. We answer that since God made man according to the divine image, then no matter the difference between God and man, there remains a point of contact between them so that meaningful intellectual communication is possible. That God has chosen to convey information to us through the Bible means that language is adequate, and so we must affirm that it is possible to know detailed and reliable information about God through his verbal revelation.

To argue that man cannot know God due to the difference between the two is self-refuting, since the statement itself necessitates considerable knowledge about God. The person who says that God is unknowable is asserting a piece of information about the very nature of God. But if God is indeed unknowable, no one can know that he is

unknowable. That we have the concept of God in our minds and that we can debate the question demonstrate that God must be knowable.

It is likewise self-refuting to say that human language is inadequate to convey information about divine things, since the statement itself carries a piece of information about divine things, namely, that they are of such nature as to render verbal descriptions about them impossible. Since the statement itself is a verbal description about the very nature of divine things, it refutes itself.⁴⁵

The Bible teaches that God has revealed himself through the words of Scripture. This alone affirms both the knowability of God and the adequacy of human language. God is capable of telling us about himself, and we are able to understand what he communicates. Therefore, God is knowable, and he has chosen to tell us about divine things through verbal communication, rather than through religious experiences or intuition. Objections against the knowability of God and the adequacy of language thus goes against the biblical worldview, and must confront the arguments for the Christian faith presented in the previous section of this book.

After determining the knowability of God, the next logical question is how much we can know about him. The Bible teaches the INCOMPREHENSIBILITY of God. Psalm 145:3 says that "no one can fathom" his greatness, and the apostle Paul writes in Romans 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" God is infinite and we are finite; therefore, we can never know everything about God.

But just because we cannot know everything about God does not mean that we cannot know anything about him. In our context, to "comprehend" means to have a complete understanding of God. This is impossible for finite beings, including sinless angels. No matter how much about God we come to know, there will always be more to know about him.

Since God is infinite in his being, there are an infinite number of propositions that may be said about him.⁴⁶ Our cognitive abilities are limited and we live in time. If there are an infinite number of propositions about God, then it would be impossible for any finite being to know all of them. This limitation will remain even after the resurrection of believers. Although our minds and bodies will undergo considerable improvements, we will remain finite, and therefore God will remain incomprehensible to us.

However, it remains that we can know much about God. We can know and understand everything that the Bible says about him. Jeremiah 9:24 says that one can understand and

⁴⁵ Language is always adequate to represent any thought. For example, one may use "X" to designate any concept or sum of concepts, and it will always be adequate, since words are only arbitrary symbols that can refer to anything. The question is whether human beings have the ability to think about God, not whether words are adequate to talk about him. And man can indeed think about God, having been made in the divine image.

⁴⁶ There are an infinite number of true propositions about God, but this is not the same as saying that all propositions about him are true.

know God's very character, that he is one "who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth." The doctrine of God's incomprehensibility does not nullify the possibility of true and abundant knowledge about him by finite human beings through scriptural exegesis.

We must not allow God's incomprehensibility to negate his knowability. Although we cannot possess exhaustive knowledge about him, we can indeed have true knowledge about him. Whatever God reveals to us through the words of Scripture is true, and we have true knowledge about God to the extent that we know and understand these words. I may know another person's name or age without knowing anything else about him, but this does not mean that my limited knowledge about him is false.

Although it is true that the more that I know about a person, the better I will understand what I already know about him, what I know about him before is nevertheless true. By gaining additional information about a person, I acquire a richer context from which to understand the implications of his name or age, but my knowledge about his name or age was true even before gaining the additional information. Likewise, although we do not have a comprehensive knowledge about God, what we know about him from the Bible is nevertheless reliable and accurate.

Although we cannot know God fully or exhaustively, we can know him truly by knowing the words of Scripture. The doctrines of God's knowability and incomprehensibility preclude the claim that we know everything there is to know about God, but they also remind us that we can have true and accurate knowledge about him.

Christians who do not immediately grasp certain biblical doctrines sometimes give up by calling them "mysteries," but the knowability of God warns us against doing this. This tendency of some to illegitimately label biblical doctrines as mysteries exposes a defect in their mentality – it may imply a misunderstanding of the nature of revelation, or even a slothful or rebellious attitude toward the Scripture. Often the person indeed understands the doctrine, but he refuses to accept it. Since he cannot deny its biblical origin, he calls it a mystery to avoid affirming it.

For example, many have labeled as mysteries the doctrines of the Trinity and divine election. However, since the Bible teaches these doctrines and tells us what to think about them, we should not call them mysteries, but rather authoritative doctrines that all believers must affirm. Revealed doctrines are not mysteries. Since God has revealed considerable amount of information about these topics, they are clear biblical doctrines that demand universal acceptance. To close one's eyes and call them mysteries is nothing short of blatant defiance against divine revelation. Refusing to understand or accept anything that the Bible teaches is to insult the God who has given us the priceless gift of his verbal revelation.

We may now proceed to examine other divine attributes, beginning with those that elaborate on the form of his existence, or his metaphysical attributes. One such attribute is the NECESSITY of God, meaning that he exists by logical necessity. Recall from an

earlier discussion that, by saying "God exists," the Christian does not refer to some generic God, but only to the biblical or Christian God; that is, God is as the Bible says he is. It is not general theism that believers should defend, but the entirety of the Christian faith.⁴⁷

In terms of modal logic, we are affirming that God exists in every possible world. A "possible world" is reality as it can be, in which any contingent being or event can be otherwise. For example, it is possible for a given person to be taller than he is, and it is possible for a certain car to be red instead of green. Any reality that does not contain a contradiction is a possible world. A statement such as $2 + 2 = 4$ is true in every possible world, and $1 + 1 = 10$ is false in every possible world. To say that God's existence is a logical necessity means that the proposition, "God does not exist" entails a contradiction in this and every other possible reality. The Scripture's description of God necessitates such a conclusion.

Some maintain that God does not exist by logical necessity, but only by factual necessity in our present reality. Since our claim is that he exists by logical necessity in every possible world, we should agree that he also exists by factual necessity in this reality. But given what we know to be true about God, it is inadequate to say that he only exists by factual necessity in this reality, and may not be in other possible worlds. Our knowledge of the divine attributes necessitates the conclusion that God exists by logical necessity, and not only factual necessity. The dogmatical argument and the transcendental argument from the previous section also render any possible reality inconceivable unless the entire biblical worldview is first presupposed.

God is an uncaused being, and since he is the one who created and now sustains all that exists, he had also existed before all else. No one besides himself sustains his being. This refers to the ASEITY of God, sometimes called his SELF-EXISTENCE or INDEPENDENCE. He exists "from himself,"⁴⁸ and does not depend on anything external to himself for his existence. He is a "self-contained" God, and exists by his very own nature.

The Bible says that "the Father has life in himself" (John 5:26), but our existence is dependent on the will and power of God: "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Revelation 4:11 says, "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." The apostle Paul says in Acts 17:25 that God "is not served

⁴⁷ I would even argue that there is no such thing as general theism, since any theistic outlook is always tied to a worldview, so that there is Christian theism, Islamic theism, and other varieties. None of them agrees on what the "theistic" God is like. Therefore, one cannot argue for theism alone to make all theistic religions possible, and then proceed to argue for other claims within a particular theistic worldview. Since each worldview has a unique view of God, one must argue for his own view of God (which already means that he must argue for his worldview as a whole), and not a general God that several worldviews can accept, because there is no such thing. Therefore, to establish the existence of the Christian God does not serve Islam or Mormon interests at all. In fact, establishing the existence of the Christian God automatically refutes Islam and Mormonism, since their views of God are mutually exclusive.

⁴⁸ Anselm: "But what are You save that supreme being, existing *through Yourself* alone, who made everything else from nothing?"; *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*; p. 89.

by human hands, as if he needed anything," but that he is the one who "gives all men life and breath and everything else."

The divine name that God revealed to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14), points to his self-existence. It also suggests that God exists in an eternal state. He created time itself, and he is therefore independent of it. This attribute of God's existence is called his ETERNITY or TIMELESSNESS. Genesis 21:33 says that he is "the Eternal God." The Book of Psalms reveals that he is "from everlasting to everlasting" (41:13), and that he is "from all eternity" (93:2). The apostle Peter writes, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8).

One implication of God's eternity is that all knowledge is as an eternal intuition to him. Although there is a succession of ideas in the mind of man, this is not true with God. Man reasons from the premises to the conclusion, a process that requires time and a succession of ideas in the mind. However, since God is timeless, all propositions are before his mind as one eternal intuition or thought. Therefore, God thinks without mental associations or a succession of ideas. He thinks by pure intuition, since all knowledge is immediately present before him, even facts that pertain to our future.

This does not mean that logic is different to God or that propositions are inadequate to express his thoughts. Logic is the same to God as it is to us, but a succession of ideas does not exist in his mind because of his timelessness and unlimited intellect. If he were to put his thoughts into words for us, there would be a succession of ideas in his message, with one thought leading to another.

He would follow all the valid rules of logic, which proceed from his rational nature. We affirm this not through empty speculation, but since the Scripture is the word of God, we know how he expresses himself in words. In addition, the Son of God took on human attributes and entered time. The biblical account of him shows that Christ articulated his mind through intelligible speech, following all the valid rules of logic.

Some maintain that our mental makeup is so different from God's that logic itself is different with him. They suggest that "God's logic" is different from "human logic," and therefore our reasoning according to human logic does not apply to him. This betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of logic itself. Logic is not only what makes human communication convenient or intelligible, but they are necessary rules for right thinking, having their origin in God's nature. Since God himself is rational, all thinking about him and reality must adhere to logical rules. A concept such as a square circle is just as nonsensical and inconceivable to God as it is to us.

Besides, to argue that "human logic" does not apply to God is to use human logic to say something about God, which is self-refuting. If human logic is inapplicable to him, one can never say so and expect to make sense at the same time. Far from saying that logic does not apply to God, Jesus was a master debater, as seen from his encounters with the hostile religious leaders. One theologian-philosopher translates John 1:1 as follows: "In the beginning was Logic, and Logic was with God, and Logic was God." This may

horrify anti-intellectual Christians, but the word *logos* can just as easily be translated "logic" or "reason" as it can be translated "word."

That God does not reason from premises to conclusions does not mean that his is not a rational mind, but it means that he is simultaneously aware of all premises and conclusions, and therefore does not need to think through logical arguments as we do. But we must insist that logic is the same to God as it is to us, and although his knowledge exists as an eternal intuition, he can express his thoughts in propositional form, as he has done in the Scripture.

The IMMUTABILITY of God follows from his eternity. Since there is no "before" or "after" with God, he is unchangeable in his being and character. This attribute is also associated with his perfection. If God's being has every possible perfection, then any change in him must be for the worse. But since he is immutable, he cannot change for the worse. And since he already possesses every perfection, he has no need to change or experience development.

Psalm 102:25-27 says that, although the physical universe undergoes decay and will perish, God remains the same:

In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.

God says in Malachi 3:6, "I the LORD do not change." The apostle James writes that God does not "change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). God says in Isaiah 46:11, "What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do," and Psalm 33:11 says, "the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations." Finally, Numbers 23:19 says, "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?"

The immutability of God implies his IMPASSIBILITY. This means that God is without "passions" – emotions or feelings. Less thoughtful believers are quick to protest against saying that God has no emotions, since the Bible seems to reveal a God who experiences emotive states such as grief, joy, and wrath (Psalm 78:40; Isaiah 62:5; Revelation 19:15).

Proponents of divine impassibility explain that passages appearing to ascribe emotions to God are anthropopathisms. The opposition then protests that this is to avoid the obvious teaching of Scripture by relegating to anthropomorphism or anthropopathism anything that they do not wish to associate with God. But those opponents of impassibility who are otherwise orthodox in their beliefs readily accept those biblical references as anthropomorphic that ascribe to God bodily parts such as hands and eyes. Therefore, one

must not dismiss anthropomorphism or anthropopathism as an explanation without good reason.

To say that God experiences emotions in a similar way as human beings appear to incur a number of contradictions:

A man may become angry against his will in the sense that he does not choose to become angry, nor does he choose to experience whatever caused the anger, but given his present state of mind and character development, the "trigger" incites this emotion in him against his preference. The same applies to human experiences of joy, fear, and grief. Although one may develop a remarkable level of self-control by the sanctifying power of the Scripture and the Holy Spirit, it remains that one's will and emotion do not maintain a one-to-one relationship. A person's emotional state is not always exactly the way he wishes or decides it to be.

However, the above cannot be true about God even if he were to experience emotions, since such lack of self-control contradicts his sovereignty, immutability, and omniscience. For example, that God is all-knowing and thus cannot be "surprised" eliminates certain ways of experiencing emotions. Thus, omniscience alone renders impossible some emotions, or at least the ways or reasons for experiencing them. If my actions can grieve or anger God in a similar way that I can grieve or anger a human being, then it means that I can cause God to grieve or become angry whenever I wish. On the other hand, if my actions can generate joy in him in a similar way that I can generate joy in a human being, then it means that I am able to cause joy in God by my will. In this manner, I would be exercising a measure of control over God himself, which contradicts his sovereignty and immutability.

We must therefore affirm some form of divine impassibility. If God is grieved by our sins, it is only because he wills to be grieved by them, and not because his mental state is beyond his control or subject to our influence. At least in this sense and to this extent, we must affirm that God is without passions. Even if God has emotions, they are under his complete control, and they will never compromise any of his known attributes.

Christians in some cultures are quicker to defend the role of emotions, whether in God or in man, because they have been influenced by modern psychology, and not just because they refuse to accept the explanation that the biblical descriptions of God as having emotions are anthropopathisms. A discussion on the nature of emotions will help us better understand how they relate to God and man.

The dictionary defines "emotion" as "disturbance, excitement; the affective aspect of consciousness; a state of feeling; a psychic and physical reaction (as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling and physiologically involving changes that prepare the body for immediate vigorous action."⁴⁹ The word originally means a disturbance of the mind. Although this meaning is now obsolete in colloquial speech, I know of at least one theologian-philosopher who still defines emotion as a mental

⁴⁹ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition.*

disturbance. Even in common usage, it remains a "psychic and physical *reaction*." Whether it is a disturbance or a reaction, it no longer sounds as good or necessary as people make it appear.⁵⁰

Contrary to popular teaching, the Bible never says that the mind consists of the will, intellect, and emotion. This borrows from secular psychology, not biblical psychology. Under such a scheme, the will, intellect, and emotion are distinct parts of the mind, so that the mind is only real as the aggregate of the three. Since they are independent, there is no necessary relationship between the growth and development of each part. Thus, Christians who assume this false framework sometimes say that one must not only develop his intellect, but that he must also develop his emotion.

However, the Bible states that the inward part of man is the mind or intellect. The will and emotion are not things in themselves, but merely functions of the mind. For example, digestion is not an organ apart from or within the stomach, but the stomach is what exists as a physical organ, while digestion is the function that it performs. Likewise, the mind is what exists as the inward and incorporeal part of man. Sometimes it gets disturbed, and a disturbance of the mind affects how it thinks, often in a negative way. Therefore, the emotion is not in itself good. Although the Bible does not call all emotions sinful, many emotions can indeed be sinful, and sinful emotions often lead to other sins:

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:6-7)

Christians do not need to be more emotional; they need more self-control. The Bible contains not nearly as many emotional words or phrases as people want to believe. Some may even misinterpret the contentment in Philippians 4:12 as an emotional satisfaction, that is, before they realize that it is a Stoic word denoting indifference.⁵¹ And is "happy" even an emotion in the Bible? Love is not an emotion in the Bible, but a volition.

One mark of the spiritual man is self-control, including mastery over his emotions. The mind of God is so integrated that he only does what he wills, and he is never "disturbed" against his will, if at all. As we grow in sanctification, our emotion ought to increasingly come under our conscious control, so that we get excited because we decide to get excited, become angry because we decide to become angry, and we can stop the moment we decide to stop.

⁵⁰ In my view, a definition of emotion should include, "a disturbance of the mind that may interfere with the normal process of rational thought."

⁵¹ "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being *content* in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

I grant that Jesus experienced emotions, but the question is what one may infer from this fact.⁵² Those instances when Jesus experienced emotions were indeed disturbances of the mind (Mark 14:34), but since Hebrews 4:15 says that he never sinned, we are to conclude that not every disturbance of the mind is sinful. However, one cannot argue from this that emotions are good, or that it should not be restrained or suppressed. Jesus also experienced hunger and fatigue (Matthew 21:18; Luke 4:2; John 4:6), but this fact only proves that the Son of God indeed took on human attributes.⁵³ Therefore, that Jesus experienced emotions only proves that he possessed real human attributes and that not every disturbance of the mind is sinful. What we see in the Gospels is that Jesus was always in full control of himself.⁵⁴

The Bible favors self-control over mental instability, which is often what having an emotion means. However, when having an emotion merely means expressing a certain type of thought, as in strong approval or disapproval, then to the degree that the person remains in control of his mind, and to the degree that this is not an involuntary or immoral disturbance of the mind, then perhaps it is acceptable. But this already excludes many instances of emotional expression.

Therefore, by affirming divine impassibility, we are not robbing God of any valuable qualities. Rather, we are saying that he has perfect mental stability and self-control; he cannot be disturbed against his will. But there is really no reason against affirming full divine impassibility, that the mind of God is never disturbed at all.

We have introduced the UNITY of God by implication. Unlike human beings, God is not divided into parts, but he exists as one eternal whole with all of his attributes as one and inseparable. This is sometimes called his SIMPLICITY, since God is not complex, or divided into parts.

Although a given part of the Bible may emphasize a specific divine attribute, it does not mean that the divine attributes are completely separable, that one attribute may at times override another, that one is more important than another, or that one more closely expresses God's essence than another. Scripture shows us that God is his attributes: 1 John 1:5 says, "God is light," and 1 John 4:16 says, "God is love." Therefore, God is not a being who is love with light as an attribute, or vice versa; rather, he is love and light, as well as his other attributes.

We should not think of God as emphasizing a certain attribute during one period in history, and then emphasizing a different attribute during another. Even some Christians

⁵² We should be careful in using the example of Jesus to justify our own actions, or to produce arguments on how Christians should behave. We must make sure that there are indeed good parallels.

⁵³ However, just as Jesus as the second person of the Trinity could never experience hunger or fatigue, he as pertaining to his divine attributes, which were never put aside even as he ministered on earth, would still be without passions. Only his human nature experienced hunger, fatigue, and passions.

⁵⁴ He was so disturbed before his arrest that he bled through his skin, but he never lost control. He was able to pray, resolve to fulfill the will of God, and rebuke his disciples for sleeping. Although some understand the passage as saying that he was only sweating in a manner similar to bleeding, the point remains that he was under intense pressure, but still retained full control of himself.

think that God is wrathful in the Old Testament but merciful in the New Testament. However, it is the Old Testament that says, "His love endures forever" (Psalm 136), and it is the New Testament that says, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). The unity of God means that he is both loving and just at all times. He has always been merciful to his elect and wrathful to the reprobates, whether in the Old or New Testament.

Another metaphysical attribute of God is his SPIRITUALITY. God is incorporeal; he is without a body. Jesus says, "God is spirit" (John 4:24). Given some of the known attributes of God, we understand that a number of biblical passages referring to him as having bodily parts are anthropomorphic. For example, 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." The NASB says that the eyes of the Lord "move to and fro throughout the earth." But to say that God has physical eyes to see would compromise his omniscience, since then he would not be seeing the areas where his eyes are not looking. Also, our eyes do not work by themselves, but they are organs that work with our brain and optical nerves. For his physical eyes to be useful, God must then also have a brain, optical nerves, a spinal cord – just like a man. This is what some heresies maintain, but it contradicts the doctrines of divine transcendence and invisibility (1 Timothy 1:17; Job 9:11). The cited portion of 2 Chronicles 16:9 should be understood as figurative – among other things, it is saying that God is aware of all that happens on the earth.

Another example comes from Isaiah 66:1, where God says, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool." Some insist that we take such passages "literally." But then God's legs would have to be just that long – the length of his legs would be the distance between heaven and earth. How then could he have said, "I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling" (2 Samuel 7:6), since the tent would have been too small for him? Some versions of this heresy – that God has a body – assert that he is of a similar height as human beings. But this would contradict the verse in Isaiah, since no human being is taller than several feet. It is more natural and accurate to understand biblical passages ascribing bodily parts to God as anthropomorphic.

Luke 11:20 also illustrates that the biblical references to God's body parts are anthropomorphic: "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you." Jesus indicates that he casts out demons by "the finger of God," and so it seems to some that God has a hand with fingers like us. However, in the parallel passage of Matthew 12:28, Jesus says that he casts out demons "by the Spirit of God." It should be obvious that the finger of God is figurative of the Spirit of God, and not that God possesses bodily parts like the human fingers.

In Deuteronomy 4:15-16, Moses says to the people of Israel, "You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman." Unlike human beings, God has "no form"; therefore, Moses forbids anyone from constructing an image that claims to resemble the appearance of God, not even one that is in the form of a human being. If it is

forbidden to construct a physical image of God because he has no form, then it is also unjustifiable to assume that God has a form in our thinking and in our theology.

More than a few professing Christians have succumbed to the teaching that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit have bodies. They do not realize that the doctrine is a heresy, and that it is a Mormon or pagan doctrine rather than a Christian one. To summarize, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit do not have bodies, but God the Son has taken on human attributes, including a physical body. Yet the divine attributes are not mingled or confused with the human attributes even in him. For example, God the Son is omnipresent in his divine nature, but his human nature is not omnipresent.

God possesses each divine attribute in an unlimited way and to an unlimited extent. This is the INFINITY of God. Psalm 119:96 says, "To all perfection I see a limit; but your commands are boundless," and Psalm 147:5 says, "Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite" (NASB). The attributes of God are infinite and boundless.

For example, the doctrine of divine omnipotence indicates that God has unlimited power or ability. Now, what is infinite is not simply greater than the finite in degree, but also in kind. A person who has a billion times the wealth of another still operates within human limitations and the monetary system, but one who has unlimited and infinite resources operates on a different level altogether. One who lives a thousand times longer than another person is still mortal, but one who is immortal is not only greater in degree, but in kind.

That God is infinite means that he is not just a greater version of ourselves; he is more than a "superman." His power and wisdom are infinitely greater than ours, not just much greater. An understanding of this fact should ignite the fear of God in us, and put an end to the flippant attitude that even Christians have toward God nowadays.

Even those who call themselves lovers of God often challenge his verbal revelation and his way of doing things. However, defiance against God is not a characteristic of the genuine believer; those who truly love God and know what he is like would also fear him. Unlike those whom God had rescued from Egypt but who unceasingly murmured against him, we should heed the words of Ecclesiastes 5:2, "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few."

The metaphysical attributes of God demonstrate his TRANSCENDENCE. Although divine transcendence means that God is "outside" of space and time, it is not in fact an idea that denotes his "location," since God is incorporeal. Rather, the emphasis is that God is independent of space and time, and not limited by them.

Nevertheless, the IMMANENCE of God reminds us that he is not distant from us in a way that makes personal attention and communication from him impossible. The Bible portrays a God who is involved in human history and individual lives. God is very

different from and superior to us in many ways, but he is still able to interact with human beings. In short, God's is both transcendent and immanent, and these two attributes do not contradict or diminish each other.

Related to this is the OMNIPRESENCE of God. Although God is transcendent, his immanence is such that he is present everywhere. Psalm 139:7-10 says:

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.

This does not mean that God occupies every point in space, since he has no spatial dimensions at all. Yet we can affirm that God is indeed present everywhere in the sense that he knows all that occurs at any point in space, and can exercise his full power there. God is omnipresent because nothing can escape his knowledge and power.

God is a TRINITY, and all the divine attributes apply to each member of the Godhead. Although there is only one God, he subsists in three persons, each fully participating in the one divine essence. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit fulfilled their unique roles at the baptism of Christ:

As soon as *Jesus* [God the Son] was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw *the Spirit of God* [God the Spirit] descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a *voice from heaven* [God the Father] said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:16-17)

What is often called the Trinitarian Benediction says, "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 Corinthians 13:14).

Matthew 28:19 has a particular relevance to a discussion on the Trinity: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Note that this verse does not say the following:

1. "...into the *names* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."
2. "...into the *name* of the Father, and into the *name* of the Son, and into the *name* of the Holy Spirit."
3. "...into the *name* of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit."

The first and second versions would imply that we are dealing with three separate beings. And since the third retains the word "name" in the singular, it does not make a clear

distinction between the three persons. However, Jesus does not put his statement in any of these three ways.

What the verse says is "...into the name *of the* Father and *of the* Son and *of the* Holy Spirit." The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each receives a definite article, thus indicating a clear distinction between the three, but the word "name" remains in the singular, thus indicating the essential unity and equality of the three.

1 Peter 1:1-2 is another text that assumes the Trinity of God and indicates the unique role each member plays in the work of redemption:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of *God the Father*, through the sanctifying work of *the Spirit*, for obedience to *Jesus Christ* and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

The historic doctrinal formulation of the Trinity says, "God is one in essence and three in person." This proposition entails no contradiction. For there to be a contradiction, we must affirm that "A is non-A." In our case, this translates into, "God is one in essence and three in essence," or "God is one in person and three in person." To affirm that God is one and three (not one) at the same time and in the same sense is self-contradictory.

However, our formulation of the doctrine says that God is one in one sense and three in a different sense: "God is one in essence and three in person." Moreover, although each of the three persons fully participates in the one Godhead, the doctrine does not turn into tritheism since there is still only one God and not three.

The "essence" in the above formulation refers to the divine attributes, or the very definition of God, so that all three persons of the Godhead completely fulfill the definition of deity. But this does not imply tritheism because the very definition of deity involves each member of the Trinity, so that each member is not an independent deity. The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct "persons" because they represent three centers of consciousness within the Godhead. Therefore, although all three fully participate in the divine essence so as to make them one God, these three centers of consciousness render them three persons within this one Godhead.

For example, all three members of the Trinity know that Christ would die on the cross to save the elect, but neither the Father nor the Spirit thought, "I will die on the cross to save the elect," but rather, "He [the Son] will die on the cross to save the elect." On the other hand, God the Son affirmed the same thought in the first person, as "I will die on the cross to save the elect." Thus, although all three members of the Trinity possess omniscience, their relationships to the propositions known are different.

Other than the charge of self-contradiction, attacks on the Trinity often involve compromising the deity of one or more persons of the Godhead. Since the deity of God

(the Father) is not in dispute, and since a later chapter will discuss the deity of Christ, here we will briefly demonstrate the personhood and deity of the Holy Spirit.

Peter says in Acts 5:3-4 that Ananias has lied to the Holy Spirit, but one can only lie to a person. And Peter adds that in lying to this person, Ananias has lied to God:

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have *lied to the Holy Spirit* and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have *not lied to men but to God.*"

Matthew 12:31 says, "And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven," but only God can be blasphemed. Hebrews 9:14 calls the Holy Spirit the "eternal Spirit," but only God is eternal. Therefore, these two verses indicate that the Holy Spirit is God.

Other passages that affirm or imply the deity of the Holy Spirit include the following:

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Genesis 1:2)

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? (Psalm 139:7)

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. (1 Corinthians 2:10-12)

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

The passages cited at the beginning of this section on the Trinity (Matthew 3:16-17, Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14, 1 Peter 1:1-2) also imply the equality of the three divine persons, and thus the deity of the Son and the Spirit.

There is a distinction of roles within the Trinity. The Bible portrays the Son as subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit as subordinate to the Father and the Son (John 14:28; 15:26). However, since we have already established the essential equality of the three members of the Godhead, we recognize that such subordination is only functional. Although the Son performs the will of the Father, and the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, the three persons are equal in essence. Such submission within the Godhead occurs only by mutual consent.

This provides a basis for us to understand submission among human beings. Although all people are equal as human beings, God commands us to obey the designated leaders (Ephesians 5:23; Hebrews 13:17; Romans 13:5). This is not because the leaders are inherently superior as human beings, but God is pleased to establish certain authority structures within legitimate institutions such as the church, the family, and the state. So, there are times when God requires one person to submit to another, but in essence the two are equal. Since it is God who ordains legitimate authority structures, one's willing submission under the appointed leaders demonstrates his love and obedience toward God.

Moving forward from our overview of God's metaphysical attributes, we will now examine some of his other attributes, such as those related to his intellect, character, and power.

The divine attributes are closely related to one another, and thus it was unavoidable that we have already mentioned the OMNISCIENCE of God several times. That God is omniscient means that he knows all propositions. Some theologians and philosophers add that he also knows the relationships between all propositions. Although this is true, it is redundant because even the relationships between propositions can be stated as propositions, which of course God knows. It is also unnecessary to say that God knows the truth or falsity and the actuality or potentiality of all propositions, since these can also be stated as propositions. Therefore, it is sufficient to say that divine omniscience means that God knows all propositions, and this is to affirm that God possesses all knowledge.

Since God is timeless, all knowledge exists before his mind as an eternal intuition. For us to "think through" something implies a process, or a succession of thoughts in our mind where one thought leads to another. That our minds are finite means that we can hold only a limited number of propositions in our immediate consciousness at any moment. Only an omniscient being can hold in his immediate consciousness all propositions and be fully aware of them. Such is the mind of God, and he can indeed perceive all things with exhaustive depth and clarity at all times, even things pertaining to our future.

The Bible says, "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" (Hebrews 4:13). God is "perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16), and he "[makes] known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come" (Isaiah 46:10).

God's exhaustive knowledge of everything includes even our thoughts and intentions: "For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths" (Proverbs

5:21); "the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts" (1 Chronicles 28:9); "I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds" (Revelation 2:23).

The omniscience of God makes it possible for the Christian's mind to become an altar of worship, constantly offering prayer and thanksgiving to God: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14); "The LORD detests the thoughts of the wicked, but those of the pure are pleasing to him" (Proverbs 15:26).

Other biblical passages teaching the omniscience of God include the following:

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. (Psalm 139:1-4)

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. (Isaiah 40:28)

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (Romans 11:33)

An attribute related to divine omniscience is the WISDOM of God. To say that God is wise places emphasis on his exhaustive understanding of all things, his ability to make the best decisions, and that he will always accomplish his purposes through the best means.

Paul says that ours is "the only wise God" (Romans 16:27). The prophet Jeremiah says that God "founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding" (Jeremiah 10:12). Romans 11:33 indicates that his wisdom, as with his knowledge, is unlimited: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"

The OMNIPOTENCE of God refers to his unlimited power and ability to create what he wills and to control his creation.

It is often asked whether this means that God can create something that amounts to a contradiction; however, the question suffers from what we may call the CATEGORICAL FALLACY. This means that a term or concept has been misapplied to an issue in question such that one does not even belong in the same category with the other, and thus the statement or question becomes unintelligible and meaningless.

For example, the question "How big is your cat?" makes sense, since size is a category that can be meaningfully applied to animals. The same is true for "How fast is your car?" and "How smart is your son?" However, it makes no sense to ask, "Is the color green fast or slow?" or "Is that rock smart or stupid?" Speed does not apply to color and intelligence does not apply to a rock. Green cannot be fast or slow; a rock cannot be smart or stupid.

There is a similar problem with the question asking whether divine omnipotence implies the ability to perform a contradiction, such as, "Can God create a rock so big or heavy that he cannot lift?" However, God is incorporeal, and thus physical forces do not act upon him at all. When God "lifts" an object, there is no physical force to restrain him. What force is going to make the rock "heavy" to God? Whether the object is big or heavy to us is completely irrelevant. If God creates a rock, he will always be able to do anything he wants with it.

Now, a square circle is a self-contradictory concept. The category of ability does not apply to creating a contradiction, since a contradiction is not something to be created – a contradiction is *nothing*. Therefore, it is meaningless to ask whether God can create a square circle, since it is nothing to be done at all.

The omnipotence of God is defined as his ability to create what he wills and to exercise complete control over his creation. God does not act contrary to his own will or nature, and he does not perform contradictions, since contradictions are nothing to be performed.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ When responding to the question (often intended as a challenge to the coherence of biblical theism) of whether God can create or perform contradictions, many Christians are too quick to insist that divine omnipotence does not mean that God can do everything. For example, God "cannot" lie or die. Then, they would apply this to contradictions, saying that God cannot create or perform them.

However, this accepts the confusion inherent in the question, and on that basis supplies a compromising response that is often theologically irrelevant to the Christian God, and that makes an unnecessary concession about God's ability. The answer is often irrelevant because, when it comes to creating a rock too heavy for God to lift, the category of weight does not apply to an incorporeal God in the first place, so to accept "heavy" as applicable to "God" means that one is no longer answering for the Christian God. Then, the answer makes an unnecessary concession because a contradiction is nothing to be created or performed, such that the issue of ability is inapplicable, and so to say that God "cannot" create or perform a contradiction is to unnecessarily say that God "cannot" do something, when it is really nothing.

Even the common illustrations that are meant to clarify divine omnipotence demand our reconsideration. First, does the Scripture really say that God "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2, KJV), or is it in fact God "does not lie" (NIV) or God "never lies" (ESV)? Go check the Greek. Second, even if we have access only to the KJV, so that the verse reads "cannot lie," why must we assume that "cannot" is here used in the same sense as it is in the question under discussion? Depending on the intention and the context, "cannot" sometimes means "does not." Hebrews 6:18 says that it is "impossible for God to lie," but then we still need to know why or in what sense it is impossible. Is it because God is inherently unable to speak falsehood as if it is truth? Or is it because whatever God says becomes the truth (Romans 4:17)? Power and the Word are one in God. Why can he not lie? Is it because of inability, or something else? Does the category of ability apply at all in this case?

Likewise, when we say that God "cannot die," are we saying that he lacks the ability to die, or should we rather say that death does not apply to the Eternal in the first place? Nothing eternal "can" die, but the "can"

God reveals himself as "God Almighty" to Abraham in Genesis 17:1. The creation account of Genesis 1-3 is no doubt a testimony to his unique abilities – not only is he capable of creating inanimate objects, but he has also created living things, with man as the crown of his creation. Psalm 115:3 says, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him," and Job says to God, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). God says in Jeremiah 32:27, "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"

Other biblical passages teaching the unlimited power of God include the following:

O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. (2 Chronicles 20:6)

If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, "What are you doing?" (Job 9:12)

For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? (Isaiah 14:27)

I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed – I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses...that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it? (Isaiah 43:11-13)

Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. (Jeremiah 32:17)

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No

here has nothing to do with ability — the category does not apply at all. The eternal does not die, and when we say that God "cannot" die, we are referring to the utter impossibility of it, the inconceivability of it, the inapplicability of it, and not his ability or inability.

We should be deathly afraid to say that God cannot do something, that is, in the sense of inability. If we were to attribute inability to God — assuming that there is ever a legitimate and relevant application of inability to God — we must be certain that we use the term in the right sense, that we are not making an unnecessary concession by adopting anti-biblical assumptions, that the biblical verses being used to support our explanation indeed teach what we assert, and that it is not merely an equivocation on our part. We must avoid all silliness and carelessness, such as in the response, "God cannot perform contradictions because he is rational, and he cannot or will not act against his rational nature" — as if an irrational God would be "able" to perform contradictions!

one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"
(Daniel 4:35)

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27)

For nothing is impossible with God. (Luke 1:37)

The LOVE of God is a favorite topic among people. It is often stressed that "God is love" (1 John 4:8); however, few people understand the meaning and implication of this.

It is popular to claim that the love of God is universal. Although it is true that God expresses a general benevolence to all of his creatures, it is untrue that he loves everyone in the same way and to the same degree. The Bible says that "God does not show favoritism" (Romans 2:11), but this only means that God does not dispense his favor according to some irrelevant condition found in his creatures. The context of Romans 2:11 is not that "God loves everyone unconditionally," as many people say, but that he condemns all sinners whether they are Jews or Gentiles: "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law" (Romans 2:12). Likewise, Colossians 3:25 says, "Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism."

Now, Acts 10:34-35 states, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." The type of universality referred to here is one of national or ethnic universality, that God has chosen some to be saved from "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). It does not say that God accepts everyone "unconditionally," but that he accepts only those who approach him on his terms, and the Bible makes it clear that only those whom God has chosen for salvation will come to him in such a fashion.

Since God chooses his elect without consideration of any prior or foreseen conditions found in them, and then supplies all the necessary conditions by which he makes them right with himself, it is accurate to say that God unconditionally loves the elect. But he does not unconditionally love everyone.

It is true, therefore, that God does not show favoritism, but this only means that he condemns all reprobates and saves his elect regardless of their ethnic and social background, or any other irrelevant condition in them, and that any relevant condition in them has been decreed by him in the first place. It does not mean that he favors every person.

Nevertheless, God shows a general benevolence to his creatures. Jesus says, "[God] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). God sends rain and supplies other non-spiritual benefits through his providential government over creation. This is his general benevolence since the benefits included are available to both believers and unbelievers. No one can live one

additional moment without it. Other natural provisions such as air, light, food, and certain kinds of knowledge also come under this category of God's providence. We may acknowledge that the "love" of God is universal in this restricted sense.

On the other hand, the love of God has special meaning for those whom he has chosen for salvation. God has chosen to save the elect and condemn the reprobates, and in such a context, he loves only the elect. As Romans 9:13 says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." John H. Gerstner writes:

"Repent or Perish" forces people to ponder seriously the popular slogan, "God hates the sin and loves the sinner." Is a necessary repentance consistent with "God loves the sinner"? If God loves the sinner while he is alive, it is strange that God sends him to hell as soon as he dies. God loves the sinner to death? Loves him to everlasting torment?

There is something wrong here. Either God loves the sinner and will not send him into the furnace of His eternal wrath; or He sends him into His eternal wrath and does not love him....

What leads almost everyone to believe that God loves the sinner is that God does the sinner so much good. He bestows so many favors including letting him continue to live. How can God let the sinner live and give him so many blessings, unless He loves him? There is a kind of love between God and sinners. We call it the "love of benevolence." That means the love of good will....God can do well to the sinner without loving him with the other kind of love....⁵⁶

The command of Jesus for us to love our enemies is said in the same context as the universal benevolence of God:

But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31)

To love one's enemies is to "do good" to them, just as the Father does good to those who hate him. Paul confirms that this is what is meant when we are instructed to love our enemies: "'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by

⁵⁶ John H. Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*; Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000 (original: 1990); p. 208.

evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:20-21). To be faithful to the command of Jesus that we must love our enemies, we should do good to those who hate us.

That said, we are to also participate in the divine hatred of God against the reprobates. As Psalm 139:21-22 says, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies."

Other verses referring to a holy hatred against the reprobates and their deeds include the following:

Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, the wrath of the LORD is upon you... (2 Chronicles 19:2)

The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. (Psalm 5:5)

Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping. (Psalm 6:8)

I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. (Psalm 26:4-5)

I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the LORD. (Psalm 31:6)

You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. (Psalm 45:7)

Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked. (Psalm 97:10)

I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil. (Psalm 101:3-4)

I hate double-minded men, but I love your law. (Psalm 119:113)

Away from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commands of my God! (Psalm 119:115)

If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! (Psalm 139:19)

My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. (Proverbs 8:7)

To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech. (Proverbs 8:13)

The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked bring shame and disgrace. (Proverbs 13:5)

The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished. (Proverbs 16:5)

The righteous detest the dishonest; the wicked detest the upright. (Proverbs 29:27)

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8)

For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. (Isaiah 61:8)

My inheritance has become to me like a lion in the forest. She roars at me; therefore I hate her. (Jeremiah 12:8)

Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. (Amos 5:15)

I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. (Amos 5:21)

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. (Romans 12:9)

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

...snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. (Jude 23)

As Gerstner points out, it is popular to teach that "God hates the sin but loves the sinner," and that believers ought to hold the same attitude. However, the above verses contradict

the notion that we are to love the reprobates but hate their sins; they indicate that we are to hate both the evil people and their evil deeds.

Some are so prejudiced against saying that God hates certain individuals that their assertions concerning the subject contradict their otherwise sound biblical knowledge.

For example, H. L. Drumwright, Jr. is correct when he writes, "It must...be recognized that the Hebrew thought-form makes no sharp distinction between the individual and his deeds. A man in Hebrew thought is the sum total of the actions of his life..."⁵⁷ It ought to follow from this that there is no sharp distinction between hating a man and his deeds.

Drumwright thinks otherwise! He continues, "...so that to say God hated a man is not to say that God was maliciously disposed toward a particular personality, but to note divine opposition to evil that was registered in that life."⁵⁸

This is pure lunacy. If $A = B$, then to hate one is to hate the other; there is no difference. But according to Drumwright, if $A = B$, and God says he hates A, it means that he only hates B and not A.

He is saying that because a person (A) is the sum total of his actions (B), when God says that he hates a person (A), he does not in fact hate the person (A), but only the sum total of his actions (B). This inference is ridiculous. He acknowledges that a person *is* the sum total of his actions ($A = B$); therefore, it cannot be that whatever applies to A is somehow transferred to B so that it no longer applies to A. But if $A = B$, then whatever applies to *either* A or B applies to *both* A and B. If God hates *either* A or B, he hates *both* A and B, since A *is* B. This should be easy to understand.

What has controlled Drumwright's thinking is a prior determination that God does not hate any person regardless of what the Bible teaches, and incompetent scholarship is the result. Based on the first portion of the quotation from Drumwright, one can infer only the conclusion proposed here,⁵⁹ that God hates both the reprobate and his evil deeds, since the person is the sum of his beliefs, thoughts, and actions.

However, God sovereignly chose to extend mercy to his elect, imputing to them the very righteousness of Christ, who was "slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). The elect are also sinners, and deserve to be hated by God. But God set his love upon them in eternity, redeemed them through the work of Christ, determined to transform them by his Spirit (Ezekiel 11:19), and ordained in advance the good works that they are to perform (Ephesians 2:10). The elect are "predestined to be conformed to

⁵⁷ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975, 1976; p. 46.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ What he says about Hebrew thinking contradicts his own conclusion, but supports the one proposed in this book.

the likeness of his Son" (Romans 8:29). "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18).⁶⁰

Now, the Bible says that God regards the wickedness of the reprobates as continuous:

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. (Genesis 6:5)

...every inclination of [man's] heart is evil from childhood... (Genesis 8:21)

In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. (Psalm 10:4)

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. (Matthew 7:17-18)

But if a person is the aggregate of his thoughts and actions, and the thoughts and actions of the reprobates are continuously evil, then it is nonsense to say that one can love the sinner and hate the sin, since one cannot be considered apart from the other. Gerstner agrees: "As far as 'hatred of sins' is concerned, sins do not exist apart from the sinner. God does hate sinning, killing, stealing, lying, lusting, etc., but this alludes to the perpetrator of these crimes."⁶¹

Peter Kreeft once told a homosexual college professor, "I love the sinner but hate the sin."⁶² After some discussion, the professor responded:

Well, suppose the shoe was on the other foot. Suppose *you* were in the minority. Suppose what you wanted to do was to have churches and sacraments and Bibles and prayers, and those in power said to you: "We hate that. We hate what you do. We will do all in our power to stop you from doing what you do. But we love you. We

⁶⁰ God sent Christ to redeem the elect because he loved them, but how could he love those he ought to hate? This is an insoluble problem under INFRALAPSARIANISM, in which the decree for the fall of all men occurs before the decree to redeem the elect, so that the various decrees follow a historical order. However, the problem does not appear under SUPRALAPSARIANISM, in which the election of some to be saved in Christ occurs before the decree for the fall of all men, so that the various decrees follow a teleological order. When speaking of the order of eternal decrees, we are of course only considering a logical order and not a temporal one, since all thoughts are simultaneous in the mind of God.

⁶¹ Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*; p. 211.

⁶² Peter Kreeft, *How to Win the Culture War*; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002; p. 90.

love what you are. We love Christians; we just hate Christianity. We love worshipers; we just hate worship. And we're going to put every possible pressure on you to feel ashamed about worshipping and make you repent of your sin of worshipping. But we love you. We affirm your being. We just reject your doing." Tell me, how would that make you feel? Would you accept that distinction?⁶³

Kreeft had to admit that hatred directed against Christianity is tantamount to hatred directed against his own person: "You're right. I would not be comfortable with that distinction. I would not be able to accept it. In fact, I would say pretty much what you just said: that you're trying to kill my identity."⁶⁴

Misconceptions about what it means to love our enemies have resulted in a loss of holy indignation and bold opposition against those who hate God. The desire to obey Christ's command to love our enemies is commendable, but as mentioned, he is telling us only to do good to those who hate us. This is analogous to the general benevolence that God shows toward all human beings (Matthew 5:43-45). However, the Bible never says to think of the reprobates as something that they are not; rather, the scriptural position is that all reprobates are depraved fools and evil rebels. To think of them as something better amounts to a rejection of Scripture.

Therefore, although we are to exhibit a general benevolence toward the reprobates, we must also imitate God's holy hatred against them, and be jealous for his honor. The way some people "love" their enemies amounts to taking sides with them against God, but the reprobates are still reprobates even if we are commanded to love them. We love them when we offer to do them good and refuse to do them harm (Romans 12:20-21, 13:10). On the other hand, we have "nothing but hatred" (Psalm 139:22) for the reprobates in that we oppose the totality of who they are, what they believe, and what they do. We strive to diminish their influence and resist their agendas by the power of the gospel. Contrary to popular belief, we are even to rejoice over the judgments that God inflicts upon the reprobates:

Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments. (Psalm 48:11)

The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked. (Psalm 58:10)

When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy. (Proverbs 11:10)

Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you. (Revelation 18:20)

⁶³ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 94.

Biblical hatred may be defined as "an intense aversion or active hostility that is expressed in settled opposition to a person or thing."⁶⁵ Love and hate in our context are not emotions, but volitions. They are policies of thought and action toward their corresponding objects. Since God is impassable, and his mind cannot be disturbed, it means that divine love is not a disturbance of the mind, but an intellectual disposition of favor toward its objects; hate is its opposite. Likewise, when the Bible commands believers to hate certain people or things, it is dictating our intellectual dispositions of favor and opposition, not our emotions.

What most Christians fail to understand is in what sense we are to love the reprobates and in what sense we are to hate them. Now it should be clear that we love the reprobates in the restricted sense of showing them general benevolence, but we hate them in the rather unrestricted sense that we are against everything about them. Therefore, both the love God and Christians have toward the reprobates are on a more restricted level, offering to them temporal kindness, while on a deeper level the two groups are in direct opposition.

Complete hostility to the thoughts and actions (beliefs, desires, preferences, values, lifestyles, habits, etc.)⁶⁶ of another person, which is the same as hating the person himself, is hatred at the deepest level, much deeper than stripping him of his temporal and superficial welfare. By this definition, God and Christians hate the reprobates at the deepest level possible, and likewise, the reprobates hate God and Christians at the deepest level possible.

For example, to regard the Christian faith as false is to hate me at the deepest level possible, since the content of the Christian faith permeates all of my thinking and behavior. Any aspect of my life that is not yet controlled by biblical precepts is only because I am still imperfect in sanctification, and not that I oppose Scripture in that area. Therefore, for one who regards Christianity as false, there is nothing in me for him to love. He cannot love me and hate my beliefs – I *am* my beliefs; I *am* a Christian.

Likewise, I may treat the reprobate with kindness in speech and action (and in this sense I walk in love toward him), but if I regard his entire worldview and lifestyle as sinful, and if it is my duty from God to order both the private and public aspects of my life in opposition to such a worldview and lifestyle, then I indeed hate him at the deepest level possible.

The reason that we are to do good to the reprobates even though we must have "nothing but hatred" (Psalm 139:22) for them is that God has reserved for himself the right to avenge his own honor and to preserve justice for his elect: "Do not take revenge, my

⁶⁵ *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3*; p. 46.

⁶⁶ "Good works" performed by the reprobates are sinful, since they do not do them to glorify God, but for some other purpose. Now, we have said that any proposition only finds its proper meaning in relation to God, but since the reprobates do not have a right relationship with God, nor do they consider even true propositions in their proper relations to God, all the thoughts of the reprobates are sinful.

friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

This is why Christians are not to spread their faith and diminish the influence of unbelievers through violence or any unjust means. It is up to God to exact revenge upon the reprobates. Christians can doubtless endorse legal punishments against unbelievers, such as the execution of dangerous criminals (Romans 13:4).⁶⁷ God ordained the government for this purpose. On the other hand, the church must use spiritual weapons to advance its cause, so that we demolish the wicked mainly through biblical arguments in preaching and teaching:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

If the love of God applies to all people in the above restricted sense, it refers to his favorable disposition toward the elect without the same qualifications and restraints: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).⁶⁸ Whereas we have been speaking of a general benevolence available to all, now we are focusing on a special benevolence that is directed only to those whom God has chosen, and it is an effectual love that results in their salvation. This is God's SPECIAL GRACE or SAVING GRACE.

Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44), and "no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him" (v. 65). Paul explains:

Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. (Romans 9:13-18)

⁶⁷ Whereas God pardons the elect of their sins, punishments dispensed by earthly governments apply also to Christians who have committed crimes.

⁶⁸ The context of the verse demands that we understand "us all" to be all the elect, and not all human beings. Thus, God lavishes his sacrificial and giving love upon those whom he has chosen for salvation.

We must delay a fuller treatment on divine election to later portions of this book; nevertheless, from these verses we see that not everyone in the world will or can be saved. One can only be saved if God enables him, but he does not enable everyone.

Therefore, God does not love everyone in the saving sense, although we may say that he loves everyone in the restricted sense of a general benevolence. Concerning those who are the object of God's saving love, Paul writes, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). This does not apply at all to the reprobates – those whom God has not chosen for salvation – since they will indeed be separated in the afterlife from God's love, in every sense of the term.

Other passages referring to God's love for his elect include the following:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

But 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. (Ephesians 2:4-5)

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)

Romans 5:8 says that Christ died for the elect while they were still sinners. This verse implies that it is acceptable but imprecise to say that God loves the elect but hates all sinners, since he indeed loves the elect sinners who are not yet converted. Therefore, when precision is preferred, it is better to say that God loves the elect but hates the reprobates. Some of the elect are already converted, and others of this group who are still sinners will be converted. But the reprobates will never undergo conversion and will forever remain the object of divine hatred and wrath (Romans 9:13, 18).

One important but neglected benefit that the love of God makes available to Christians is spiritual illumination:

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. (John 14:21)

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:15)

Theological knowledge – that is, intellectual knowledge about spiritual things – is one of the least prized gifts from God. But to be a friend of God means to have such knowledge. The scorn with which many professing believers regard doctrinal studies shows that they do not truly love God, although they would like to think that they love him.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 tells us that our priority is to obtain understanding and knowledge about God:

This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but *let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me*, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)⁶⁹

The knowledge of God is the most valuable treasure, and everything else is "dung" (Philippians 3:8, KJV) in comparison. In offering his elect reliable information about himself, God is giving them one of the greatest gifts that he can give to them.

The Bible says that God's children are to imitate the Father's divine attribute of love. The first and greatest commandment is to love God, and the second is to love other human beings:

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40)

To understand these two great commandments, we must know what it means to love God, and what it means to love other human beings.

One common misconception about the love of God is that it is only a greater version of human fondness and courtesy.⁷⁰ This is what many people mean when they claim that they love God – they are fond of him. But to the extent that one has a distorted conception of God, this means that he is fond of his misconception of God, so that he is not even fond of God at all. Nominal Christians would turn against God and grow to hate him once they find out what he is truly like. God is the triune deity who judges every thought and intention, demands exclusive worship and obedience, condemns all the reprobates, redeems only the elect, establishes Christianity alone as truth, and does all that he pleases. Such a God is repugnant to the unregenerate.

⁶⁹ The knowledge of God is not a mystical knowing as aberrant Christianity affirms, but an intellectual one. The verse uses the words, "understands and knows"; it is a "knowing that" or "knowing about" the things of God.

⁷⁰ *Oxford American Dictionary of Current English*: "deep affection or fondness...delight in; admire; greatly cherish."

Faithful biblical preaching helps to decrease the number of false converts in the church, since reprobates would find the true Christian faith intolerable once they realize what it teaches. The truth attracts the elect, but repels the reprobates (1 Corinthians 1:18):

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"...He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. (John 6:60-61, 65-66)

Of course, if the church has been preaching the true word of God in the first place, there would not be so many false believers in our congregations now.

Again, a common misconception about the love of God is that it is an emotional fondness, and at best added to that an element of selfless giving. When such a concept of love is applied to what it means to love God, a shallow and sub-biblical spirituality results.

The Bible gives us a different definition of what it means to love God:

So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today – to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul... (Deuteronomy 10:12)

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. (John 14:21)

Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me." (John 14:23-24)

You are my friends if you do what I command. (John 15:14)

The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:4-6)

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome... (1 John 5:3)

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. (2 John 1:6)

Only a true Christian can love God as defined by these verses – he obeys God's commands, and submits to him in thought and action. Of course a Christian is also fond of God, but such fondness is feigned if he does not also obey the divine commands in the Bible. Thus, love for God is not defined by fondness or admiration, but obedience.

Since to love God means to obey biblical teaching, and to obey biblical teaching, one must first know about it, it follows that theological knowledge is the prerequisite of walking in love. This destroys the anti-intellectual notion that one can love God without studying theology, or that loving God is superior to knowing about him. To love God is to obey his teaching, but to obey his teaching, one must first grasp it with the intellect, and this is to study theology. Theology makes love possible.

To further emphasize this, we may look more closely at the "first and greatest commandment." The relevant biblical passages are as follows:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and *with all your mind.*' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:35-40)

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and *with all your mind* and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." "Well

said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Mark 12:28-33)

Matthew 22:35-40 and Mark 12:28-33 are parallel passages in which Jesus states that the greatest commandment is to love God:

1. "...with all your heart"
2. "...with all your soul"
3. "...with all your strength"
4. "...with all your mind"⁷¹

The answer that Jesus gives comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-9.⁷² However, in Deuteronomy, Moses only says to love God:

1. "...with all your heart"
2. "...with all your soul"
3. "...with all your strength"

In his answer, Jesus adds his interpretation of the greatest commandment, namely, that we must love God "with all [our] mind." His interpretation is authoritative and binding, and even the Deuteronomy passage itself provides sufficient information for this conclusion, that the commandment is telling us to love God with our minds. Verse 5 is the one that says, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." The verses that follow explain what this commandment implies:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

We are to write them down, talk about them, and think about them. What all this amounts to is theological reflection, or as Jesus implies, to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength, is to love God with all our mind. The teacher of the law in the passage from Mark also perceives this and gives the paraphrase that the greatest commandment is to love God "with all your understanding" (Mark 12:33).

⁷¹ The passage from Matthew leaves out "strength," but this helps reinforce the fact that the terms are synonymous in the first place.

⁷² "Love your neighbor as yourself" comes from Leviticus 19:18.

Therefore, rather than divorcing love for God and the intellectual life, or regarding them as antagonistic to each other, the Bible explicitly states that love for God rests upon our very intellect. The greatest commandment is to love God with our mind. Paul writes to the Colossians: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds" (Colossians 1:21), and Jesus explains that sin originates from the mind: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19).⁷³ The reprobates hate God with their minds, but regeneration reverses this, and enables the elect to fulfill the greatest commandment. God says that the new covenant is one in which, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33; also Hebrews 10:16).

As for love toward other human beings, in addition to what has already been said above, Paul writes that "love is the *fulfillment* of the law" (Romans 13:10). Some people have the idea that love is the *replacement* of the law, rendering the Old Testament moral commands irrelevant. But the Bible teaches that to walk in love is to fulfill the law, or to do what it says rather than to ignore it.⁷⁴

The ceremonial laws have been permanently fulfilled in Christ. What they foreshadowed have not been done away with, but only fulfilled in the person of Christ. As the priesthood of Christ is continuous, the fulfillment of these laws are still in effect. Therefore, there is now no need for the animal sacrifices and purification rites.

However, the moral laws of God remain relevant and binding on all people. To walk in love toward other human beings is to obey the moral laws of God concerning how we ought to treat people. For example, among other things, we must not steal from others or lie about them; we are to uphold justice and show mercy to the poor. Paul writes:

The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are *summed up* in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:9-10)

Love is a summary of the moral laws, not a replacement. Therefore, since we are commanded to walk in love, the moral laws of God are still in full effect.

⁷³ Man is a dichotomy, and consists of soul (mind, intellect, heart, or spirit) and body. He is not a trichotomy of spirit (heart), soul (mind, intellect), and body. The heart or the spirit is the soul (mind or intellect) of man. Heart, soul, and strength in the passages under discussion are synonymous terms, used for emphasis, referring to a person's inner being, which Jesus interprets as the mind of man. Some commentators try to impose fanciful distinctions between these terms in this verse, but this is illegitimate and unnecessary. Thus, even if Jesus had not added the word "mind," the commandment would mean the same thing as what is claimed here, since the heart and soul are synonymous with the mind. See Vincent Cheung, *Godliness with Contentment*, chapter 2.

⁷⁴ Jesus says in Matthew 23:23 that the "more important matters of the law" include "justice, mercy, and faith." These are not new concepts introduced in the New Testament.

To recapitulate, the love of God implies general benevolence toward all his creatures, but to the elect, self-sacrifice (in redeeming them through Christ) and self-disclosure (in giving them theological knowledge). Among other things, to love God means to devote our intellect to the worship and service of God, to acquire knowledge about him and his commands, and to obey all biblical precepts. As for loving other human beings, it means to obey the laws of God in our relationships with people.

The love of God is never in competition with his JUSTICE or RIGHTEOUSNESS. Since God is the ultimate authority, and all propositions find meaning only in relation to him, all moral concepts are defined by his own nature. To say that God is loving and just is to say that he always acts according to his own nature, with specific emphasis placed on the type of actions that the words such as love and justice describe.

Justice is defined by the nature of God, and to say that God is just means that he always acts in accordance with his own nature when it comes to matters of right and wrong or good and evil. He is righteous because he always does what he thinks is right. Likewise, we are righteous when we do what God thinks is right for us to do, and we sin when we do what he thinks is wrong for us to do. Jeremiah says that God is one who enforces and delights in justice (Jeremiah 9:24), and Isaiah calls him "a God of justice" (Isaiah 30:18). He will one day "judge the world with justice" (Acts 17:31).

Those who wish to learn the ways of God in making just and wise judgments must go to the Scripture. Psalm 19:9 says, "The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous," and Psalm 119:160 says, "All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal." Paul writes, "So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12). Jesus teaches us to "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (John 7:24). Making a right judgment is possible only if we know something about how God thinks, which in turn is only possible through studying the Bible.

God's justice demands that he punishes evildoers. Since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), it means that he must punish everyone unless there is a way through which his justice may be satisfied without destroying those he wishes to save. To accomplish this, God sent Jesus Christ to die for the elect, and thereby saving from damnation those who would believe in him. On the other hand, "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

God "presented [Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement" (Romans 3:25) so that God "might be just and the justifier" (v. 26, NASB) of those who have faith in Christ. This addresses the question of how God can justify sinners if justice demands that they be punished. God sent Jesus to die for the elect, to accept the punishment that they deserved. Thus, God maintains his own standard of justice in condemning the reprobates, but he is also just in pardoning the elect, since Christ has paid for their sins.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Although we will discuss definite atonement in a later section of this book, this explanation by Paul about the work of Christ is sufficient to imply that the atonement was particular and not universal. Christ

Other biblical passages affirming the justice and righteousness of God include the following:

He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he. (Deuteronomy 32:4)

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. (Psalm 36:6)

He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. (Psalm 72:2)

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. (Psalm 89:14)

He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity. (Psalm 98:9)

May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous. (Psalm 119:172)

For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)

Since Christians are the children of God, it is unnatural for them to be suspicious or opposed to the WRATH of God, but some professing believers speak and behave as if it is not a biblical doctrine. The Bible teaches us to know both "the kindness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22, NASB). The wrath of God is just as much a divine attribute as his love; therefore, to have a proper concept of God, we must come to know his wrath.

One purpose of the reprobates – "the objects of his wrath" or those who are "prepared for destruction" – is that God may reveal this aspect of his nature to "the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory" (Romans 9:22-23). Since Christians have been "saved from God's wrath" (Romans 5:9) through Christ, this is one divine attribute that the elect will never experience, and therefore it must be demonstrated to them in other people. Recall that one benefit God gives to the elect is information or knowledge about himself, and this shows us to what lengths he will go to make himself known to his people.

died only for his elect, and not every human being. If Christ had died for the sins of everyone, there would be no sin for which God will condemn the reprobates. However, the Bible says that God will condemn many reprobates; therefore, Christ did not die for the reprobates.

The wrath of God is his divine anger against all that is contrary to holiness and righteousness;⁷⁶ it is his intense hatred toward sin and wickedness. Unlike much of human anger, divine anger is not emotional or petty, but it stems from God's holy nature, and it is altogether good and justified.

The wrath of God is directed against all who reject Jesus Christ:

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:12)

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him. (John 3:36)

But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. (Romans 2:8)

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. (Ephesians 5:6-7)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (Colossians 3:5-6)

That the wrath of God will be poured out against those who reject Christ does not mean that the reprobates who have never heard the gospel are exempt, since every non-Christian who has not directly rejected the person and work of Jesus Christ has nevertheless rebelled against the knowledge of God that is innate within them: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" (Romans 1:18-19). Therefore, all reprobates will suffer under God's intense anger.

But the wrath of God will not come upon the elect: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). God appointed the reprobates to "suffer wrath," but he has appointed us to "receive salvation" through Christ. Therefore, we can credit our salvation only to God's sovereign appointment, and not to a non-existent "free will" by which we choose to follow Christ, so that no one may boast before him.

⁷⁶ Again, the impassability of God implies that his anger is a policy of thought and action rather than an emotion, or a disturbance of the mind.

The bulk of the discussion concerning divine election is reserved for the chapter on salvation, but since we have already brought up the subjects of election and wrath, we should also consider the divine attribute of the WILL of God.⁷⁷

Theologians distinguish between the "secret" and the "revealed" will of God based on Deuteronomy 29:29, which says, "The *secret* things belong to the LORD our God, but the things *revealed* belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." "The things revealed" would include all that is recorded in Scripture – God's precepts, commands, doctrines, and predictions. Having been revealed to us, the content of Scripture "belongs" to us. It is the immediate object to which we owe our allegiance and obedience – "that we may *follow all the words* of this law."

On the other hand, the "secret things" belong to God. People experience disappointment when they attempt to discover God's secret will while making decisions. Worse yet, many fall into serious spiritual error and bondage as a result. The very nature of his secret will is that its content is concealed, and therefore those who try to penetrate it always fail. These people chase after visions, dreams, and prophecies – sometimes even through forbidden practices, such as astrology and various kinds of divination. Christians should affirm the sufficiency of Scripture instead.

Since the Bible is able to equip a person "for *every* good work" (2 Timothy 3:17), it must already contain sufficient information so that he who is familiar with its content will never make any personal or moral decision that offends or displeases God. The Bible contains all the information one needs to live a life that is fully acceptable to God. It may not show us everything that we wish to know, but it contains all that God wishes us to know. The Scripture is sufficient so that having learned its content, we will not require additional and tailor-made directions about our lives and circumstances to make decisions that are pleasing to God. As for God's secret will, it includes things that we do not know about until they have happened. Such things include future contingencies that have not been predicted in the Scripture, whether major historical events or personal circumstances.⁷⁸

The will of God determines every major and minor event, to the point that not even a sparrow can die without his willing it: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father" (Matthew 10:29).⁷⁹ Thus, God's will is inseparably connected to his power. He says in Isaiah 46:10, "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." His predictions, declaring the end from the beginning, are more than mere forecasts, but they are at the same time declarations of what he will do, since not even a sparrow can die apart from his will. For God to predict the time and manner of a sparrow's death is to reveal his active decree concerning the

⁷⁷ The will describes the decision-making function of the mind; it is not a distinct part of the person that is separated from the intellect.

⁷⁸ See Vincent Cheung, *Godliness with Contentment*, "Biblical Guidance and Decision-Making."

⁷⁹ The point of the verse is that God controls everything; therefore, the sparrow is not the smallest thing that he controls. Even a snowflake cannot land where it does apart from his active decree.

time and manner of its death. For God to predict what will happen is to reveal what he will do. Everything that occurs must be willed by God, else all the power of the universe cannot cause its occurrence.

We must by extension also affirm that the recipients of salvation have been chosen by God's will. Therefore, salvation is not dependent on the will or work of man, but on the sovereign mercy of God (Romans 9:16).⁸⁰ He is not obligated to be merciful to anyone, but "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18).

Even the choices and the circumstances of man are determined by his sovereign will:

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:16)

The LORD works out everything for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster. (Proverbs 16:4)

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way? (Proverbs 20:24)

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. (Proverbs 21:1)

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35)

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (James 4:13-15)

Everything is subject to God's will – there is nothing that is beyond his control, and he has not chosen to forego making a decision on any matter.

To those who abhor the rule and glory of God, this is a repulsive doctrine, and so they protest against it. But to those who love him, the absolute sovereignty of God is a source of joy and comfort. What better way can we have it, than to have God to rule over all?

⁸⁰ REB: "Thus it does not depend on human will or effort, but on God's mercy."

Divine election to salvation will receive additional treatment; meanwhile, it is settled that God's reign over his creation is total, and that nothing happens apart from his will.

This contradicts the assumption that God does not decree evil. Of course God decrees events that are contrary to his moral precepts; otherwise, there could be no evil. However, this does not make God himself evil. To sin or commit evil, one must violate a moral law of God, but God cannot sin, since his own actions define what is right or wrong, and Scripture says that his actions are always good and just. Therefore, the very fact that he decrees certain evil events only means that it is right for him to do so.⁸¹ There is no authority or standard higher than God by which to condemn him.

Does this make God a tyrant? If the word simply means, "an absolute ruler,"⁸² then of course God is a tyrant. And since he is the sole moral authority, the very fact that he is a tyrant means that he ought to be one, that it is good and just for him to be one. The negative connotations of the word apply only to human beings, since no human being should possess absolute authority. But God is "an absolute ruler" – that is what it means to be God.

The Bible calls frequent attention to the HOLINESS of God. There are two aspects to this divine attribute, emphasizing the moral purity and the transcendence of God. Both aspects imply separation from that which is sinful or that which assumes a lower form of existence. To be holy is to be righteous, moral, and pure, but also aloof, separated, and different.

Combined, these two aspects of divine holiness mean that there is no one like God in his moral purity and superior state of existence. In connection to his holiness, the Bible emphasizes that God is unique, and that no one approaches his greatness: "There is no one *holy* like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God" (1 Samuel 2:2); "'To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?' says the *Holy One*" (Isaiah 40:25).

Isaiah 57:15 is an inspiring verse telling us how the holiness of God implies his "high and lofty" state of existence (transcendence), and yet he is close to those who are "lowly in spirit" (immanence): "For this is what the high and lofty One says – he who lives forever, whose name is holy: '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.'"

Some people wish to stress the possibility of having genuine fellowship with God, and therefore favor his immanence in a way that denies his transcendence. Detecting this distortion, others who desire to maintain a high view of God overcompensate by denying his immanence. However, divine transcendence does not preclude divine immanence, and divine immanence does not diminish divine transcendence. These two qualities of God are true and consistent with other divine attributes. Our passage says that God is indeed

⁸¹ It is because of God's absolute sovereignty that the existence of evil poses no challenge to the biblical worldview. See Vincent Cheung, *The Light of Our Minds*, "The Problem of Evil."

⁸² *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.*

"high and lofty," and no one is like him, but by his own will, he is also close to those whom he has chosen, and who will humble themselves before him.

A right understanding of divine holiness should cause us to worship and fear God:

Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy...Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy. (Psalm 99:5, 9)

Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed. (Revelation 15:4)

The holy God is inherently worthy of worship and extreme reverence; it is a serious sin to deny him of proper worship.

God demands that his people be holy like himself. Of course, we cannot be transcendent in the sense of assuming a *metaphysically* "high and lofty" state of existence. However, God has chosen us for himself in eternity, and once he calls us to faith in Christ and sets us apart in history, we can be *morally* separated from the world, and remain pure from its filth. God demands holy living from his people under both the Old and New Testaments: "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own" (Leviticus 20:26); "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Besides moral separation from the world, there is another sense in which we exist in a different manner from unbelievers. As a result of God's work in us, our thinking, source of help, social community, and even reading literature should be very different from those who wallow in the sinful manners of living in the world. We are to hate "even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh" (Jude 23).

Jesus prayed that God would not remove believers from the world, but that he would protect them from evil while they are in the world: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). This verse is sometimes used as a basis to criticize the Christians who mistook retreat from the world as a necessary implication of holy living. They avoid contact with the world to prevent being contaminated by it. But this is not what God commands, and this approach neglects some of our Christian responsibilities such as evangelism and charity. The correct use of John 17:15 encourages Christians to enter the sphere of existence of the unbelievers to engage the spiritual enemies by preaching and teaching, and to be salt and light to them through our holy speech and conduct (Matthew 5:13-16).

On the other hand, many contemporary Christians misuse this verse another way by turning it into a license for excusing a lack of personal discipline and maintaining unhealthy relationships with the world. "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world" only means that Jesus does not ask God to physically remove Christians from the

world, that God would not immediately take them to heaven once they come to faith in Christ. One can see this by observing the context. Jesus discusses his upcoming physical departure in verses 11 and 13: "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you....I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world." Jesus was certainly not "in the world" in the sense of being in sin or too involved with unbelievers, but he means that he was still physically present with the disciples. So in verse 15, Jesus only asks that the Father would not immediately remove Christians from the earth, but that he would protect them from the evil one.

Therefore, those who present verse 15 (or similar biblical verses) as an encouragement for Christians to become involved in the world in the sense of befriending unbelievers or attending parties have distorted its meaning. The verse has a different purpose altogether.

Instead, the Bible says that we are to refrain from illegitimate relationships with unbelievers:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

As God has said:

"I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

Holy living entails that we separate ourselves from the world, mainly not in the physical sense, but in the spiritual sense. That is, we do not need to reside in exclusively Christian communities or monasteries, but it is imperative that we distinguish ourselves in our speech, conduct, habits, priorities, preferences, the choice of friends, reading materials, and forms of entertainment. It is not true that we can befriend whomever we wish – Paul warns, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

We know that we should preach to sinners, and for this purpose we come into frequent contact with them, but the question is whether we should befriend them. In connection to this, it is often argued that Jesus associated with sinners. This is true, and we should do the same if we are doing it in the same sense that he did it. However, Jesus associated

with sinners not for social enjoyment, but he demanded nothing less than full spiritual conversion from them.

For example, Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5). The people disapproved, and said, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner" (v. 7). Does this not support the position that Jesus associated with sinners? But Zacchaeus said, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (v. 8). And it appears that he had undergone spiritual regeneration, since Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham" (v. 9). Then he added, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (v. 10). Therefore, this incident does not grant permission to associate with sinners for just any purpose, but only for spiritual ends. Jesus did not associate with sinners for social enjoyment, but "to seek and to save what was lost."

Another example comes from Luke 7: "When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them" (v. 37-38). An observer disapproved: "When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner'" (v. 39). But even this encounter had a spiritual end – the woman's action expressed her love for God and repentance for her sins. Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven....Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v. 48, 50).

The wedding of Cana in John 2, where Jesus turned water into wine, is often used to support the assertion that he participated in secular social and recreational activities even when there was no explicit spiritual agenda. But again, we find that his purpose was not social but spiritual, since here he worked his first miracle that manifested his glory: "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (v. 11). I have no objection against a Christian who participates in social and recreational events with unbelievers if he can consistently draw their attention to the glory of Christ.⁸³

If we list several more examples, the pattern will emerge showing that although Jesus associated with sinners, his purpose was not social or recreational, but spiritual. He demanded spiritual change from the sinners, and those with whom he remained were willing to listen to his teaching and to repent of their sins. He also taught his disciples not to endlessly pursue those sinners who refuse to accept the gospel. He said, "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces" (Matthew 7:6), and "If anyone will

⁸³ I am not objecting to necessary and official dealings with unbelievers, but I am against using Scripture, especially as it pertains to the life of Jesus, to justify social and recreational relationships with unbelievers, since no such support is available. In other words, there is no scriptural justification for any unnecessary association with sinners unless there is a spiritual agenda.

not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town" (Matthew 10:14).

Other related passages include the following:

But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. (Acts 13:50-51)

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (Acts 13:44-47)

But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (Acts 18:6)

Many Christians have succumbed to a popular idea in our culture, that when people of different worldviews and religions come together, there ought to be a free and mutual exchange of ideas. But the Scripture commands us to resist the influence of non-Christians. Jesus and the apostles never had any free exchange of ideas with unbelievers, but for them the gospel message was to dominate all situations. There is no scriptural support for the exchange of ideas among believers and unbelievers, only that of domination by believers.

We may have friendly conversations with unbelievers, but an *exchange* of ideas implies learning from them, and even the possibility of adopting their beliefs. However, just as Christ has nothing to learn from the devil, Christians have nothing to learn from non-Christians (2 Corinthians 6:15),⁸⁴ and certainly we may not adopt their beliefs. Jesus commanded us to *teach* the nations (Matthew 28:18-20), not to learn from them.

This exclusive and high view of the Christian religion is often accused of being arrogant. But this is a foolish charge, since we are not teaching private opinions, but "everything that [Christ has] commanded" (v. 20). To teach God's word as exclusive truth is a mark of obedience and faith, not arrogance. On the other hand, to suggest that biblical ideas need

⁸⁴ See Vincent Cheung, *The Light of Our Minds*, "The Light of Our Minds."

modification or improvement through an exchange of ideas with non-biblical worldviews is more than arrogant – it is to commit the sin of blasphemy.

Some may argue that although the biblical worldview requires no modification or improvement, an exchange or dialogue with unbelievers will nevertheless aid in increasing mutual understanding. I agree to this as long as the Christian's motive for understanding the non-biblical viewpoint is to refute it. We must never allow the unbelievers to think that we are prepared to accept their beliefs or to make the slightest adjustment to the biblical worldview that we affirm.

Christians are to "demolish" all non-Christian ideas and "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Scripture thus forbids showing respect to or learning from non-Christian worldviews and religions. Scripture condemns all non-biblical worldview and religions, and to imply even for a moment that we have one iota of respect for non-biblical ideas and beliefs betrays a lack of faithfulness to Christ and amounts to spiritual treason. We must continuously indicate our utter disdain for any idea that "sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Unless one is truly willing to consider non-biblical ideas, in which case the authenticity of his faith comes into question, it is dishonest to allow others to think that we are open and respectful to their beliefs.⁸⁵

Returning to our topic, those who use the argument that Jesus associated with sinners as a reason for befriending unbelievers can freely participate in social and recreational activities only if they have some sort of spiritual agenda in mind, and only if they carry it out when associating with non-Christians.

Of course, working in a secular environment necessitates some sort of interaction with sinners, but we are speaking of befriending them on a personal level. Very few Christians who befriend unbelievers on the basis that "Jesus did it" are effective in ministry to sinners, assuming that they have ministry in mind in the first place. Most of them are lying to God and to themselves – they have no intention of demanding conversion from those with whom they befriend.

To repeat Paul's admonition: "*Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'*" (1 Corinthians 15:33). That is, do not be deceived into thinking that it makes little difference with whom one associates; do not assume that one who enjoys the company of unbelievers will reap no tragic consequences.

Other relevant verses include the following:

⁸⁵ Peter tells us to answer unbelievers with "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15), but this refers to the polite behavior that believers should usually exhibit, and not respect on an ideological level. Nevertheless, there are also occasions when it is appropriate to openly ridicule the unbeliever and to expose his folly for all to see. The prophets and apostles constantly mocked and condemned all non-Christian thought. In any case, Peter never says that we are to value what non-Christians believe.

I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. (Psalm 26:4-5)

Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil. Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence; whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him will I not endure. (Psalm 101:4-5)

Away from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commands of my God! (Psalm 119:115)

Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies....Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers; their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken. (Psalm 141:4-6)

Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way. (Proverbs 4:14-15)

He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. (Proverbs 13:20)

Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared. (Proverbs 22:24-25)

Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? (1 Corinthians 5:6)

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. (Ephesians 5:3-4)

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you. (1 Timothy 6:20-21)

Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. (2 Timothy 2:16)

Most professing believers become involved with the world because they like the world, and not because they are determined to change it toward a more godly direction. But the Bible says, "Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4). Therefore, although it is unscriptural to retreat from the world and its social, economic, and political structures, we must evaluate our motive for associating with sinners, and make sure that we always remember our spiritual mission.

The Bible also gives instruction concerning relationships among believers. Although many of the restrictions applicable to dealing with unbelievers are lifted, it remains that the primary agenda and content of conversation in relationships among believers should be spiritual, and dominated by theological discussions.

Relevant biblical passages include the following:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts. (Psalm 119:63)

May those who fear you turn to me, those who understand your statutes. (Psalm 119:79)

Let a righteous man strike me – it is a kindness; let him rebuke me – it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it. Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers. (Psalm 141:5)

He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. (Proverbs 13:20)

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not. (Malachi 3:16-18)

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. (Acts 11:23)

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:29)

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:19-20)

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:9-10)

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (Hebrews 3:13)

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24)

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3)

Although Christians have nothing to learn from unbelievers, conversing with other faithful Christians to gain a better understanding of Scripture is profitable. True Christians will enjoy such fellowship in which God remains at the center of our thought and conversations, even when we are engaging in social and recreational activities. Therefore, although Christians may freely befriend other genuine believers and

participate in social and recreational activities with them, it remains that their priorities consist of spiritual and theological concerns at all times.

This concludes our overview of the divine attributes. There are some that we have not mentioned, and we can say much more about those that we have discussed, but the subject is too rich for us to attempt an exhaustive introduction. Nevertheless, this section on the divine attributes provides a foundation that will prevent any serious distortion in one's view of God. We may now proceed to the final section of this chapter, which is a discussion on the works of God.

THE WORKS OF GOD

Although the Bible presents us with a transcendent God, it also reminds us that he is deeply involved in the affairs of the universe and humanity, beginning with its teaching on his CREATION of the universe. Genesis 1 and 2 contain the historical account in which God brings forth the earth, the stars, the seasons, plant life, and all kinds of animals. The crown of his creation is man, whom he made in his own image. We will be studying the creation and nature of man in the next chapter.

God created the universe *ex nihilo*, or "out of nothing." No preexisting materials were available when God created the universe, but he created all matter by his word and his power:

You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. (Nehemiah 9:6)

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. (Psalm 33:6)

This is what the LORD says – your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself. (Isaiah 44:24)

Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. (Jeremiah 32:17)

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,⁸⁶ whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. (Colossians 1:16)

⁸⁶ God's creation includes "invisible" things, such as angels and the spiritual realm.

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. (Hebrews 11:3)

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. (Revelation 4:11)

Only God existed before he created anything – except for himself, all things were made by him. John writes in his Gospel, "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:3, NRSV). Anything at all that exists outside of God owes its existence to him.

God does not leave the universe to exist on its own, since it indeed cannot exist on its own, but he continuously sustains its existence and actively governs its operation. It is an unbiblical view that says God created the universe with certain laws that govern its operation. The biblical position is that God is holding the universe together, and controlling the most minute event within it. In other words, the entirety of this universe is being governed by a personal mind instead of impersonal powers or laws.⁸⁷

This is the doctrine of the PROVIDENCE of God. Theologians distinguish between the GENERAL PROVIDENCE and the SPECIAL PROVIDENCE of God. The former refers to his precise control and supervision⁸⁸ of events that he causes through ordinary means. The latter refers to his precise control and intervention of events that he causes through extraordinary means. Together, the general providence and the special providence of God embrace every event that occurs.

Paul writes that God the Father, through the agency of God the Son, had created not only all things "visible and invisible," but that "[the Son] is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Christ is before all of creation, and even now he is holding together the entire universe. God had created the universe by his word, and even now he is "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:3). Paul observes in Acts 17:28, "For in him we live and move and have our being."

We learn from this that all contingent beings must not only be given existence by God through his creative power, but they can continue to exist only by his sustaining power, since only God is self-existent. Nothing can exist apart from God, and claims to autonomy at any level by created things are excluded.

Besides preserving the existence of his creation, God also governs and causes every aspect of it. Not even a seemingly insignificant animal can die apart from his will (Matthew 10:29). This implies that all else are subject to his governance, but there are

⁸⁷ This biblical view of the universe means a rejection of all theories that ascribe control of human lives and world events to impersonal forces, so that all teachings concerning astrology, karma, and so forth are denied. Mechanistic science is also excluded.

⁸⁸ The sense intended here is one of causation, and not merely observation.

many other biblical passages that describe the extent and scope of his supervision over creation:

So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt....You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 45:8, 50:20)

He makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them. He deprives the leaders of the earth of their reason; he sends them wandering through a trackless waste. They grope in darkness with no light; he makes them stagger like drunkards. (Job 12:23-25)

Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. (Job 14:5)

He fills his hands with lightning and commands it to strike its mark. (Job 36:32)

Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash? (Job 37:15)

I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. (Job 42:2)

For dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. (Psalm 22:28)

God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. (Psalm 47:8)

No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another. (Psalm 75:6-7)

He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate – bringing forth food from the earth. (Psalm 104:14)

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:15-16)

He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call. (Psalm 147:8-9)

For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? (Isaiah 14:27)

When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses. (Jeremiah 10:13)

I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps. (Jeremiah 10:23)

With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him. (Jeremiah 27:5-7)

He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. (Daniel 2:21)

The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men. (Daniel 4:17)

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35)

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? (Matthew 6:26)

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Acts 4:27-28)

Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. (Acts 14:17)

And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. (Acts 17:25-26)

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:13)

That God exercises such precise and extreme control over all of creation is disturbing to many people, including some who claim to be Christians. Therefore, they often try to distort the relevant biblical passages to justify a false theology that allows them to maintain the sense of freedom and dignity that they treasure above the truth and honor of God.

But seeking to be free from God is a wicked thing. Those who love God are glad that he possesses absolute control over all things. They can say with Isaiah 33:22, "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us," and they would not have it any other way. They are bold to say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!" (Psalm 96:10).

Although everything is under God's direct providential control, there are times when his involvement is especially evident, so much so that we may describe each of these occasions as an intervention of God. Such occurrences are distinct from his ordinary direction of the natural course of events, but they are instances when God chooses to use extraordinary means to achieve his purposes. They are sometimes so spectacular so as to be called "miracles." God's works of special providence also include his works of redemption, but since a later chapter will address the subject of salvation, here we will only focus on his miraculous acts.

The Bible testifies to a God who performs miracles and works wonders:

Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11)

He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. (Job 9:10)

For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God. (Psalm 86:10)

Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever. to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever. (Psalm 136:3-4)

Jesus worked so many miracles during his time on the earth that the miraculous was recognized as a prominent feature of his ministry:

He replied..."I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal." (Luke 13:32)

When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. (Luke 23:8)

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. (Acts 2:22)

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. (John 21:25)

The disciples of Jesus also worked miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit:

Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. (Mark 16:20)

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. (Acts 2:43)

The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. (Acts 5:12)

So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. (Acts 14:13)

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. (Acts 19:11-12)

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. (Romans 15:18-19)

The things that mark an apostle – signs, wonders and miracles – were done among you with great perseverance. (2 Corinthians 12:12)

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Hebrews 2:3-4)

Modern Christians are also authorized to bear witness to Christ through the preaching of the gospel accompanied by miraculous signs:

And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. (Mark 16:17-18)

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

Opponents of Christianity reject biblical supernaturalism, denying the very possibility of miracles. Now, every argument proceeds from a given worldview and not from a vacuum. And if Christianity is a *true* worldview, if it is the *only* true worldview, and if it is true in its *entirety*,⁸⁹ then every argument that presupposes another worldview is without justification, and every claim that contradicts any biblical proposition must be false. From what theories of epistemology and metaphysics do the arguments against miracles originate? They certainly do not come from the biblical worldview itself, and

⁸⁹ See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions*, and an earlier section of this chapter.

thus they fail before they begin. If the entire Bible is true, then what it says about creation and providence are also true.

4. MAN

Since Christ precedes man in preeminence, it may appear that the doctrine of Christ deserves prior attention to the doctrine of man. But since the redemptive work of Christ permeates the study of Christ, and since it was for human beings – that is, the elect sinners – that Christ made atonement, it is therefore reasonable to first study the doctrine of man. In addition, since Christ took upon himself human attributes in the incarnation, having a prior understanding of biblical anthropology will facilitate our understanding of this and other aspects of christology.

Therefore, although Christ is the second person of the Trinity, and comes immediately after the doctrine of God in a Trinitarian structure of systematic theology, in the present course of study we will place the doctrine of man immediately after the doctrine of God so that we may understand something about the other party in the God-man relationship that is so central to Christian theology.

THE CREATION OF MAN

After creating the earth, plant life, and the animals, God created man. In creating the former things, God simply commanded them to come into being. For example, in Genesis 1:3, he says, "Let there be light," and in verse 11 he says, "Let the earth produce vegetation." As for the creation of man, the Genesis account records what seems to be a conference between the members of the Trinity, agreeing to create him in the image of God: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (1:26). Even without the other information contained in verses 26-30, this suggests a special relationship between God and man, and that special care was given to his creation.

Perhaps the most popular contemporary objection against the Genesis creation account of man is the theory of evolution. It denies the direct creation of man by God, and proposes that life originated from non-life, and that man is the product of mutations from the lower species.

The theory of evolution contradicts what Scripture says about the origin of man. Genesis 2:7, 21-22 recount the creation of man as follows:

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being....So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man was created before the woman, and since there already existed a member of the human species at the creation of the woman, God took preexisting materials from the man to create her. However, when God created the man, the Bible does not say that he used preexisting materials from the animals he had already made, but he went directly to "the dust of the ground," and directly "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

Therefore, the Bible teaches that man was created by a direct act of God, and not through biological evolution. Although there are other details in Genesis 1-2 that reinforce such an understanding,¹ the above is sufficient to show that the theory of evolution contradicts biblical revelation.

Now, the Bible itself claims that all of Scripture is divine revelation (2 Timothy 3:16), and so the entire Bible speaks with one authority. This being so, to reject any part of the Bible is to reject that authority. In other words, since the Bible itself claims that every part of the Bible is inspired by God, to reject any proposition in the Bible entails rejecting the Bible's self-claim that all of it is inspired by God.

Since the Bible itself claims that every part of the Bible is true, to judge any part of it to be false requires an appeal to an authority or standard of truth foreign to the Bible. But if one has rejected the Bible's self-claim of infallibility by judging one of its propositions as false, he cannot then accept the Bible's self-claim of infallibility when he judges another one of its propositions to be true. That is, if a person appeals to a non-biblical authority or standard to reject a given biblical proposition, he must then continue to appeal to a non-biblical authority or standard when he agrees with another biblical proposition.

For example, since the Bible itself affirms the deity of Christ, one who rejects the deity of Christ can only do so by assuming a non-biblical authority or standard by which he judges the Bible to be false.² But then, if this same individual agrees with the biblical teaching that murder is immoral, he cannot do so just because the Bible teaches that murder is immoral. Instead, he must again appeal to a non-biblical authority or standard to justify his belief that murder is immoral.

Since he has rejected the Bible's authority to justify its own claims when he rejected its teaching about the deity of Christ, he cannot now appeal to the Bible's authority to justify its own claims when he affirms that murder is wrong. However, if the non-biblical authority or standard to which he appeals is unjustifiable – and our position is that every non-biblical authority or standard is unjustifiable³ – then he can justify neither his rejection of the deity of Christ nor his affirmation that murder is wrong.

¹ For example, to understand the Hebrew word translated "day" in Genesis 1 as indicating a twenty-four hour period would rule out the theory of evolution, which claims that human life took many years to come about.

² The deity of Christ is just an example. The point is that one who rejects any biblical proposition, even a seemingly insignificant one, cannot at the same time agree with another biblical proposition by recognizing its divine authority. Since he judges one to be false by a non-biblical standard, he must judge another to be correct also by a non-biblical standard.

³ See the previous chapter of this book, and Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions* and *The Light of Our Minds*.

If by an authority or standard foreign to the Bible one accepts one part of the Bible and rejects another, then the part of the Bible he accepts is no longer true because the Bible says so, but because the authority to which he is loyal says so. Therefore, he cannot justify his belief in the part of the Bible that he affirms because the Bible says it, but he must justify this belief by the epistemological authority or standard by which he evaluates the Bible. However, if his epistemology lacks justification, his verdict on any part of the Bible also lacks justification, and what he says is worthless.

Therefore, a person who rejects one part of the Bible cannot claim to accept another part of the Bible on the basis that the second part is the revelation of God, since he has rejected the revelatory status of the former. Likewise, to accept any one of the Bible's propositions because it is a part of the Bible obligates one to accept the entire Bible as true, since the authority behind all biblical propositions is one and not many.

A person who rejects even one biblical proposition cannot at the same time appeal to divine authority to sustain his other beliefs. He must rely on that authority or standard by which he judges that one biblical proposition to be false. However, if only divine authority can justify any proposition or sustain any belief at all, then this person who relies on a non-biblical authority or standard immediately and simultaneously loses justification for everything that he affirms. Since the Bible's self-claim of ultimacy and infallibility is attached to all of its propositions, one who rejects any part of the Bible must reject all of the Bible, and one who accepts any part of the Bible must accept all of the Bible.

For our purpose, this means that one who rejects the biblical account of the direct creation of man cannot at the same time affirm the creation of the universe by God on the basis of Scripture. If one accepts the creation of the universe by God because the Scripture teaches it, he must also affirm the direct creation of man by God because the Scripture teaches it.

Now, the theory of evolution deals with what became of preexisting materials. Since no evolution could have taken place if there was nothing to evolve, the theory of evolution presupposes the existence of the universe. That is, biology presupposes cosmology. But both biology and cosmology presuppose the possibility of human knowledge, or epistemology. Thus, epistemology is prior to cosmology, which is prior to biology.

We have shown that evolutionary biology is a non-Christian biology. We have also shown that one cannot reject one aspect of the Christian worldview and then accept another aspect of the Christian worldview. Therefore, a non-Christian biology presupposes a non-Christian cosmology, and a non-Christian cosmology presupposes a non-Christian epistemology. However, if all non-Christian theories of epistemology are demonstrably false, then all non-Christian theories of cosmology are destroyed. And if all non-Christian theories of cosmology are destroyed, then all non-Christian theories of biology are also destroyed, including evolutionary biology.

To affirm evolutionary biology presupposes a non-Christian epistemology, resulting in the destruction of one's entire worldview. But to presuppose a Christian epistemology in which the exclusive infallibility of Scripture is affirmed rules out evolutionary biology from the start. Therefore, Christian biology, which affirms the direct creation of man by God, is true by deductive necessity, but it is impossible for evolutionary biology to be true.

Of course, within the context of debate, we may also temporarily take up the presuppositions of secular science for the sake of argument, and from that basis argue that evolution is "a theory in crisis" and that "the fossils still say *No*."⁴ But as I have pointed out elsewhere, all scientific reasoning is formally fallacious and cannot attain deductive certainty. Thus, the scientific arguments against evolution are weaker than the biblical argument against evolution that I am presenting here.⁵ An argument that destroys the evolutionist's entire worldview at its very starting point is certainly superior.

The following is a summary of the above argument against evolutionary biology:

1. The theory of evolution contradicts the Bible.
2. Therefore, the evolutionist cannot borrow any Christian premise in his worldview.
3. A universe must first exist for life to exist in it (or to evolve from it).
4. Therefore, any theory of biology presupposes a theory of cosmology.
5. Knowledge must be possible before a theory of cosmology can be formulated.
6. Therefore, any theory of cosmology presupposes a theory of epistemology.
7. Only Christian epistemology is justifiable and true.
8. Therefore, only the Christian worldview is justifiable and true, and thus only Christian cosmology is justifiable and true, and thus only Christian biology is justifiable and true.
9. Christian biology affirms the direct creation of man by God.
10. Therefore, the view that God made man by direct creation is true, and the theory of evolution is false.

I demand the evolutionist to tell me how a non-Christian can know *anything* before he presents to me his theories of cosmology and biology. But since the evolutionist cannot find an epistemology to support his cosmology, and since he cannot find a cosmology to support his biology, his biology exists only in his own imaginary world, and his theory of

⁴ Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*; Adler & Adler Publishers, 1997; Duane T. Gish, *Evolution: The Fossils Still Say No!*; Institute for Creation Research, 1985. Also see Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*; Touchstone Books, 1998; William Dembski, *No Free Lunch: Why Specified Complexity Cannot be Purchased Without Intelligence*; Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

⁵ This is not because the scientific case against evolution is weak, but because science itself is unable to discover any truth.

evolution is just as much a fantasy as his universe. Thus, the evolutionist does not even have the right to present his case on evolutionary biology unless I choose to hear it.

Biology does not exist in a vacuum. We cannot just agree that the universe exists and argue only about biology, since the kind of universe assumed determines what is possible within it. If non-Christian epistemology is impossible, then non-Christian cosmology is impossible, and if non-Christian cosmology is impossible, then non-Christian biology is impossible. However, once we accept a Christian epistemology, and thus a Christian cosmology, then the direct creation of man by God follows by necessity, and all non-Christian theories of biology are ruled out.

All this is only to apply the dogmatical argument to the theory of evolution. The power of the dogmatical argument is such that it conclusively establishes the entire Christian faith as true, and simultaneously serves as a conclusive refutation to all non-Christian ideas and worldviews, whether known or unknown. Since we have shown all of Scripture to be exclusively true by the dogmatical argument, and since evolution contradicts Scripture, then evolution is automatically false. That is, since only the Bible is right, and since evolution contradicts the Bible, evolution is wrong. No additional argument is required.

We may now proceed with the understanding that God made man through direct and complete creation, without any sort of evolutionary processes. Having directly formed man's body using the preexisting materials of the earth (but not from the animals), God gave him life, and man became a living being: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

As for the purpose of man's creation, the Bible teaches that man was created by the will of God for the glory of God:

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. (Revelation 4:11)

I will say to the north, "Give them up!" and to the south, "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created *for my glory*, whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:6-7)

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be *for the praise of his glory*. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will *gain glory for myself* through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD. (Exodus 14:4)

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this *to make the riches of his glory known* to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:22-24)

Some teach that God's loving nature compelled him to create suitable objects of affection to satisfy his need to exercise sacrificial and giving love. But it is heretical to say that God has any needs. Paul says in Acts 17:25, "And he is not served by human hands, *as if he needed anything*, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." Being eternally self-existent, God is self-sufficient. Since man is not eternal, but has a definite time of origin before which he did not exist, and since "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8), if ever God could exist without man, he could have continued to exist in the same state forever. Therefore, the creation of man was not due to a necessity in God.

The above passages show that God created both the elect and the reprobates for his own glory. Although the reprobates do not consciously glorify God, he gains glory for himself through them, so that he is glorified by the elect in their salvation and by the reprobates in their destruction.

Only the order of the eternal decrees in SUPRALAPSARIANISM, as opposed to INFRALAPSARIANISM, is consistent with the biblical data:

1. The election of some sinners to salvation in Christ; the reprobation of the rest of sinful mankind.
2. The application of the redemptive work of Christ to the elect sinners.
3. The redemption of the elect sinners by the work of Christ.
4. The fall of man.
5. The creation of the world and man.

Although all thoughts are simultaneous in the mind of God, the logical arrangement of the eternal decrees begins with the decree that God would glorify himself through the salvation of the elect by Christ and the destruction of the reprobates. Each subsequent decree is then made as the means by which the former one would be accomplished.

Therefore, God chose to glorify himself, and the means by which he would be glorified is the salvation of some by Christ and the damnation of all others. The means by which the latter would be accomplished is the redemptive work of Christ. And the means by which the redemptive work of Christ is made meaningful is the fall of mankind. For the fall of mankind to be possible, God decreed the creation of the world and man.

Infralapsarianism confuses the *execution* of the eternal plan with its *formulation*, so that it begins where the supralapsarian order ends. However, a rational mind formulates a plan first by determining the end, and then working backward, determines the means by which it would reach the determined end. The execution of such a plan, however, reverses the order of the formulation so that it begins where the formulation ends.

Supralapsarianism is the teleological order and infralapsarianism is the historical order. Since the purpose for discussing the order of the eternal decrees is to discover the logical arrangement of the formulation, and not the historical order of the plan's execution, supralapsarianism is the biblical position.

This means that God actively decreed the fall of mankind as one of the steps by which he would fulfill his eternal plan. Sin was not an accident, and redemption was not a mere reaction on the part of God. As the Scripture says, "The LORD works out *everything* for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster" (Proverbs 16:4).

THE NATURE OF MAN

According to the Bible, God made man in his own image: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him" (Genesis 1:27). Whatever is meant by the image of God, it cannot refer to something that God himself does not possess. Since it has been established that God is incorporeal, the image must therefore be unrelated to man's body.

However, since there are those who assert otherwise, we must take some time to deal with the issue here. We must approach the question by asking in what way man is like God, and what constitutes man's point of contact with God. We should also consider in what way man is superior to the animals.

If the image of God is seen in man's body, then it is arguable that some animals are also made in God's image, since the physical differences between man and some animals are not so vast as to say that one is made in the image of God and the other not – that is, if the image includes the physical appearance of man.⁶ But this is unacceptable since the Scripture tells us that what distinguishes man from the animals is precisely the image of God. Therefore, the image of God cannot refer to the body of man or his appearance, but something else.

Deuteronomy 4:15-18 says that God has "no form," and therefore it is unlawful to make any idol or image to represent God, even if it is in the appearance of a human being:

You saw *no form of any kind* the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, *whether formed like a man or a woman*, or

⁶ Having established the Christian worldview as true, similarities between the human body and that of the animals imply common design, not common descent.

like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below.

This passage alone is sufficient to establish that any substance with a form or appearance cannot be the image of God. Since God himself has "no form," the physical body or appearance of man cannot be the image of God; it cannot even be a part of it.

An analysis of the biblical data demands that the image of God be defined in terms of the intellect. Although man has the advantage of being an upright primate biped possessing opposable thumbs, the bodies of many animals are superior to man's in various ways. However, none of the animals can compare to man in intellectual abilities.

That God had made man in his own image means that man is a rational mind. Many animals run faster than man, many are stronger, and some can even fly, but none can understand deductive syllogisms or solve algebraic equations. Animals sometimes seem to perform tasks that require rational thinking or design, such as building elaborate nests. But upon further observation, we discover that their creativity and ability to adapt are limited, and that they are able to perform these tasks only by instinct, and not through deliberate and rational thought. Most importantly, no animal can perform theological reflections.

Man's rational mind is the likeness of God and his point of contact with him. Man's intellectual qualities are evident from the beginning of Genesis. God blessed man in Genesis 1:28-30, giving him dominion over nature by a verbal pronouncement. Adam cared for Eden not by instinct, but in obedience to God's verbal instructions. God gave man a moral command in Genesis 2:16, forbidding him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but allowed him to eat from all the other trees. Man was warned that to violate this command would result in his death. Only a rational mind can understand concepts such as duty, sin, and death.

The Bible explicitly distinguishes man from the animals on the basis of his intellectual powers:

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*, and the man became a living being....But it is the spirit in a man, *the breath of the Almighty*, that gives him understanding. (Genesis 2:7, Job 32:8)

[God] *teaches more to us* than to the beasts of the earth and *makes us wiser* than the birds of the air. (Job 35:11)

God did not endow [the ostrich] with *wisdom* or give her a share of *good sense*. (Job 39:17)

Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. (Psalm 32:9)

The new self...is being renewed *in knowledge in the image* of its Creator. (Colossians 3:10)

It is impossible to deny the conclusion that the image of God is man's rational mind, but some have tried to add other elements to this definition, such as man's morality and his dominion over nature. Although this is consistent with our position (Ephesians 4:24), we must maintain that rationality remains the basic element in defining the image of God in man.

Man has a moral nature that distinguishes him from the animals, and so it seems to some that we ought to include this as part of the image of God, even though rationality may be one element. Now, even animals and inanimate objects "obey" God's commands, but instead of doing so by a rational mind, they are compelled by God's power. But since man has a rational mind, he chooses to obey God through the intellect, and he sins by defying divine commands. Man can comprehend the concepts of good and evil, and can discuss them through the use of language. This means that man is moral precisely because he is rational; morality is a function of rationality. Therefore, although we may acknowledge that having a moral nature is part of what it means to be a human being, it is not necessary to include it as part of our definition for the image of God.

Man's dominion over the animals is also an extension or result of his intellectual superiority (Genesis 1:28-30), and not to be confused as part of the image of God. James writes, "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are *being tamed* and *have been tamed* by man" (James 3:7). Although man is physically weaker than many animals, his understanding and knowledge enable him to devise methods, tools, and weapons to tame and exploit them. Man's rule over nature is made possible by his intellectual abilities, and not by any supernatural or mystical power given by God.

The strong interest in animal rights and vegetarianism will justify a brief digression at this point. Scripture teaches that human beings are more valuable than animals and that human beings may eat animals for food:

The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. (Genesis 9:2-3)

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? (Matthew 6:26)

He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:11-12)

Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Luke 12:7)

Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! (Luke 12:24)

For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? (1 Corinthians 9:9)

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

The Christian's priority should always be human beings, not animals. Given what the Bible says about the superior value of human beings, we should allocate our resources in such a way as to aid the cause of Christ among human beings, even at the expense of the comfort and the lives of animals. Much of what is done in the name of animal rights robs from the resources that ought to be devoted to helping humanity. This is an indirect denial that man is made in the divine image, that he is special among God's creatures, and therefore it is an indirect rejection of Scripture.

As for vegetarianism, God has granted man permission to consume "everything that lives and moves" (Genesis 9:3). Scripture states that man is not restricted to eating plant life: "Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything" (v. 3). Therefore, to abstain from eating meat for spiritual reasons or as an acknowledgment of "animal rights" defies biblical teaching.

Although animal rights activists are in error, this does not mean that man may abuse and torture animals as he pleases. The Scripture gives instructions as to how we should treat them.⁷ For example, animals are to benefit from the Sabbath rest, and they must be

⁷ Humans and animals do not have intrinsic rights; only God has intrinsic rights. Humans and animals have "rights" only in the sense that Scripture commands that they should be treated in the manner it prescribes.

allowed to eat while laboring (Deuteronomy 5:13-14, 25:4). Proverbs 12:10 says, "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal." We may conclude from such passages that it is wrong to torture animals for sport or to cause them any unjustified suffering. But it remains that we are to freely slaughter them for food, since Scripture itself grants that this is legitimate. Given the contemporary tendency to favor animals even at the expense of humanity, we must strive to give priority to human beings when thinking about the treatment of animals.

God always puts humanity before the animals. After citing the biblical command that says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," Paul adds, "Is it about oxen that God is concerned?" (1 Corinthians 9:9). Even such a command about the treatment of animals have the benefit of humanity and the just treatment of man in view: "Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest" (v. 10). Therefore, we should say with Acts 10:13 where God calls to Peter the apostle, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat."

Returning to our topic, some who admit that the image of God is seen in the intellect of man nevertheless argue that since the body is necessary to express one's rational mind, whether in words or in actions, it must be at least a part of the image of God. However, the earlier reference to Deuteronomy 4:15-18 already eliminated this possibility; the body of man cannot be even a part of God's image. In addition, the argument confuses the image of God with the equipment required to express it in the physical world. The mind can certainly engage in rational communication with God without the body; we only need the body to interact with the physical world. Indeed, before the consummation of our salvation, "to be away from the body" is to be "at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). The Bible views the physical body as very important, and the New Testament even says that the believer's body is the temple of God (2 Corinthians 6:16); however, the body is not part of the image of God.

Another objection against equating the image of God with the intellect of man is rooted in the view that man is a TRICHOTOMY consisting of spirit, soul, and body. Proponents of this view assert that the Bible portrays man as a trichotomy, and since "God is spirit" (John 4:24), the image of God must therefore be man's spirit as opposed to his soul or body. This being so, the image of God is not the rational intellect of man, but it is a non-intellectual part of man called the "spirit." The problem with this view is that the Bible does not endorse trichotomy, but instead teaches that man is a DICHOTOMY consisting of soul and body.

Although trichotomists often cite Hebrews 4:12 to support their view, a proper reading of the verse renders their position impossible. The verse says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The trichotomists claim that although it is often difficult to distinguish between the soul and

Such rights only exist in relation to other creatures, since God is free to treat his creatures in whatever way he desires. See my writings on human rights, animal rights, and vegetarianism.

the spirit, this verse says that they can be divided by the word of God. Therefore, the soul and the spirit are two different parts of a person.

However, the verse does not say that the word of God can divide the "soul and spirit and body," but that it can divide "soul and spirit, joints and marrow." Since "joints and marrow" belong to the body, or the material part of man, the natural interpretation is that "soul and spirit" also belong together in the same part of a person, or the immaterial part of man.

If X = soul, Y = spirit, and Z = body, then the trichotomist understanding of this verse will make it say, "dividing X and Y, Z and Z," which generates an awkwardness to the verse that is absent in the dichotomist interpretation. Dichotomists understand that soul = spirit, and therefore X = Y. Thus, the verse reads, "dividing X and X, Z and Z," which preserves the symmetry intended by the biblical author.

Robert Reymond provides a grammatical argument on this verse, and writes:

Here the trichotomist insists, since the soul can be "divided" from the spirit, is evidence that they are two separate and distinct ontological entities. But this is to ignore the fact that "soul" and "spirit" are both genitives governed by the participle "dividing." The verse is saying that the Word of God "divides" the soul, *even* the spirit. But it does not say that the Word of God divides *between* soul and spirit...or divides the soul *from* the spirit.⁸

In addition, this verse does not in fact refer to any dividing power in the word of God, but its ability to penetrate. The word of God is so powerful that it reaches, affects, and transforms even the deepest regions of a person's mind – that is, "it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (v. 12).⁹ The next verse confirms this interpretation: "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" (v. 13). The point is that nothing about us is hidden from God, not even our thoughts and intentions.

Another verse the trichotomists use to support their position is 1 Thessalonians 5:23, which says, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is true that the three words translated "*spirit, soul and body*" are different Greek words. Some take this to mean that Paul is referring to God's preservation of the "whole" human being, which the apostle asserts to be consisting of three parts: spirit, soul, and body.

⁸ Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 421-422.

⁹ "Attitudes" are just as mental or intellectual as "thoughts." Thus the symmetry of the verse extends to this latter part, so that if Q represents the intellect, the verse would read, "...dividing X and X, Z and Z; it judges the Q and Q of the heart." X and Q, then, would be referring to the same part of man.

However, Mark 12:30 makes such an interpretation impossible. The verse says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." He mentions four items here with which we must love God, namely, the heart, soul, mind, and strength. If 1 Thessalonians 5:23 demands the understanding that man consists of *three* parts, then Mark 12:30 demands the understanding that man consists of *four* parts. Thus, the trichotomist argument from 1 Thessalonians 5:23 fails.

Many biblical verses employ repetition for the sake of emphasis. That the above verses use different words to refer to man does not necessarily mean that each word designates a different part of man; rather, the intention is to refer to the whole person.

Popular Christian preaching often assumes a sharp distinction between the spirit and the soul of man, identifying the "heart" with the spirit, and the mind with the soul. However, the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* defines "heart" (Greek: *kardia*) as, "the inner person, the seat of understanding, knowledge, and will..."¹⁰ Kittel contains a lengthy article on the word, and says, "The heart is the seat of understanding, the source of thought and reflection."¹¹ As with other lexicons, it confirms that "The NT use of the word agrees with the OT use..."¹² The word "heart" in the Bible includes a range of meanings, but unless it points to the physical organ, it is speaking of the mind, with the context of the passage giving emphasis to its particular functions.

Gordon Clark estimates that, "the term *heart* denotes emotion about ten or at the very most fifteen percent of the time. It denotes the will maybe thirty percent of the time; and it very clearly means the intellect sixty or seventy percent [of the time]."¹³ Since both the emotion and the will are functions of the intellect, or the mind, unless the reference is to the physical organ, the word "heart" in the Bible means the mind.

Having presented several pages of relevant passages, Clark concludes, "Therefore when someone in the pews hears the preacher contrasting the head and the heart, he will realize that the preacher either does not know or does not believe what the Bible says. That the gospel may be proclaimed in its purity and power, the churches should eliminate their Freudianism and other forms of contemporary psychology and return to God's Word..."¹⁴

It is unbiblical to distinguish between "head faith" and "heart faith" or "head knowledge" and "heart knowledge." In the first place, the mind of man is not his "head" or his brain. The mind of man is incorporeal, made in the image of God; it is not part of the body at all. So to make a contrast between the "head" and the "heart" is to commit theological error on more than one level.

¹⁰ *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 2*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981; p. 250.

¹¹ Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 3*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999 (Original: 1965); p. 612.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 611.

¹³ Gordon H. Clark, *The Biblical Doctrine of Man*; Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1984; p. 82.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87-88.

The trichotomist distinguishes between the spirit and the soul, or the heart and the mind, not the head, since the head belongs to the body. Therefore, the contrast is between faith in the spirit and faith in the mind, or knowledge in the spirit and knowledge in the mind.

But since trichotomy is false, such a contrast is also false. Since the words *spirit*, *soul*, *heart*, and *mind* all refer to the same immaterial part of man, faith in the spirit is faith in the mind, and knowledge in the spirit is knowledge in the mind. They are just different words for the same part of man. This also means that faith and knowledge are always intellectual.

In *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Jonathan Edwards writes regarding the inclination and will of man, that, "the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart."¹⁵ Also, Thayer writes, "*kardia*...the soul or mind, as it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors...used of the understanding, the faculty and seat of the intelligence..."¹⁶ The point is that the heart is intellectual.

After an extensive presentation of the relevant evidence, Robert Morey concludes in his *Death and the Afterlife*:

Man's immaterial side is given several different names in Scripture. It has been called the "spirit," "soul," "mind," "heart," "inward parts," etc., of man. The names should not be viewed as referring to separate entities but as descriptions of different functions or relationships which man's immaterial side has....Indeed, spirit and soul are used interchangeably in various passages...¹⁷

Therefore, a human being consists of mind and body. We may consider the terms *spirit*, *soul*, *heart*, and *mind* as generally interchangeable:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the *body* but cannot kill the *soul*. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both *soul and body* in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates *body and spirit*, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

¹⁵ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2000 (Original: 1834); p. 237.

¹⁶ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002 (original: 1896); p. 325-326.

¹⁷ Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*; Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1984; p. 65.

For it doesn't go into his *heart* but into his stomach, and then out of his *body*. (Mark 7:19)

Since many readers tend to think of the *spirit* and the *heart*, or even the *soul*, as more or less non-intellectual, I often prefer the word *mind* so as to remind the reader that, no matter what one calls it, the immaterial part of man is intellectual in nature. Words such as *spirit*, *soul*, *heart*, and *mind* all refer to the same immaterial and intellectual part of man.

In summary, the Bible teaches that man consists of two parts – the material and the immaterial: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our *outer man* is decaying, yet our *inner man* is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16, NASB). Man is a soul and a body. The soul entered into man when God breathed life into him, and it is this breath of God that gives man his intellectual powers. Our conclusion remains that the image of God is the intellect of man; that is, man is made in the image and likeness of God in the sense that man has a rational mind.

Genesis 1:27 says that God created male and female human beings: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." This verse indicates that both male and female are made in the image of God, and both belong to the category of man or mankind. The dominion that God gave to man belongs to both the male and the female, since verse 28 says, "God blessed *them* and said to *them*, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (v. 28).

The implication of these two verses is that one gender is not intrinsically superior to the other. However, although the ontological value of men and women are the same, God has imposed an authority structure upon them so as to define their roles within society, especially in the marriage relationship and church government.¹⁸ In connection with this, we will examine several relevant passages below.

After the fall of mankind, God says to the woman, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16). One common interpretation of this statement understands it as saying that the woman will experience great sexual desire for her husband, or at least a desire for his companionship. Reflecting this view, the Living Bible paraphrases the verse as, "You shall welcome your husband's affections, and he shall be your master." But this interpretation fails to relate the first clause of the sentence to the second. In addition, a similar statement appears in Genesis 4:7, but this time it is translated, "It desires to have you, but you must master it." Therefore, a proper understanding of this verse should read it as, "Your desire will be to *dominate* your husband, *but* he will rule over you."

¹⁸ George W. Knight III, *The Role Relationships of Men and Women*; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985. We will focus on the authority structure within the marriage relationship in the following paragraphs.

Some assert that man and woman had equal authority in the marriage relationship before the Fall, and it was only after mankind transgressed the law of God that man was given rule over the woman as part of the curse upon humanity. According to this view, the subordination of the woman is only a result of sin, and it has been negated after the death and resurrection of Christ.

However, not all the effects of the Fall have been eliminated after the resurrection of Christ. There are some things that must await the consummation of our salvation at his second coming. For example, sickness and death originated because of sin, but they are still in effect today. But if the work of Christ have removed all the results of sin for this stage of human history, they should be now completely absent from human experience, at least for the Christian. Therefore, even if the subordination of women resulted from sin, it does not follow that it has been negated after the resurrection of Christ unless the Bible explicitly teaches it.

But the authority of man over the woman did not originate because of the Fall in the first place. Even before God created the woman, he said that she would be the man's "helper" (Genesis 2:18). Paul teaches that the authority of the man over the woman did not originate because of sin, but that it is a creation ordinance. That is, by the nature and order of the creation of the man and the woman, the man has authority over the woman:

For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. (1 Corinthians 11:8-9)

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. (1 Timothy 2:11-13)

It is only natural that any ordinance of God instituted because of the very nature of creation is still in effect as long as we are human beings.¹⁹

In addition, both Paul and Peter wrote to believers saying that Christian wives are to obey their husbands. Thus the work of Christ and the apostolic teaching did nothing to abolish the authority structure instituted by God at creation, but rather reinforced it as an absolute moral law:

Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be

¹⁹ "While the male and female are equal in terms of their *being* or *nature*...the Scriptures also teach that they are not equal in terms of *function* or *office*. Man's headship did not arise because of the fall or as a result of Hebrew culture. Man was the head of the woman at creation as a direct institution of God Himself..."; Robert Morey, *Introduction to Defending the Faith*; Nevada: Christian Scholars Press, 2002; p. 34.

kind, and *to be subject to their husbands*, so that no one will malign the word of God. (Titus 2:4-5)

Wives, in the same way *be submissive to your husbands* so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. (1 Peter 3:1-2)

The argument saying that the redemptive work of Christ removed the "curse" of the subordination of women under men within the marriage relationship is an unbiblical position. The Bible teaches that the husband has authority over the wife at the creation of man, after the fall of man, and after the work of Christ.

Rather than teaching that the subordination of women resulted from sin, Genesis 3:16 indicates that sin produced their usurpation of men's authority. For Christian women to submit to male leadership in the home and the church is a sign of righteousness and regeneration; however, the rejection male leadership in the home and the church is a manifestation of sin and wickedness. Rather than abolishing male leadership in the home and the church, the work of Christ restored and reinforced the original divine design.

One important aspect of the feminist movement and feminist theology is to alter or abolish the biblical structure of the marriage relationship and church government. In their efforts to promote an anti-biblical "equality," the feminists have facilitated the erosion of the most basic unit of society, the family. God has designed that the man should be the head of the home from the beginning, but sin has produced in the woman an urge to usurp the husband's authority, and to be "liberated" from his rule. But the joy and hope of humanity depends on knowing and obeying biblical commands, and not in fighting against them.²⁰

The leadership of man in the family has been a controversial topic, both within and without theological circles. The reason for much of the debate is not because Scripture is unclear on the topic, but rather because of the ideological climate of the day and the sinful tendency of human beings to resent legitimate authority. As *Keil & Delitzsch* says in relation to Genesis 3:16, the desire within the woman to defy the man's authority is one that is "bordering upon disease."²¹

Our second passages comes from 1 Peter 3:1-6. Verses 1-4 say:

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over

²⁰ "Since marriage and the family belong to God, we must follow the structure of marriage which God instituted in the Garden. Adam was the head of the family and Eve was submissive to his headship. This structure is what 'ought' to be in every marriage. Thus the Women's Liberation Movement is in open violation of God's creation ordinance of marriage when it denies the man's headship over the woman"; Ibid.

²¹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 1*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001; p. 64.

without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

The passage shows that not only are wives to subject themselves to Christian husbands, but they must be submissive even if the men are unbelievers. Since elsewhere we find that a Christian woman may only marry another Christian man (1 Corinthians 7:39), Peter here addresses women who became Christians after they were married to non-Christian men.

The part concerning submissiveness enters into the discussion when the apostle says that the men may be "won over without words." This does not mean that a person may bring another to faith in Christ without verbally communicating the gospel message. It is popular to assume nowadays that "action speaks louder than words," but this is contrary to biblical teaching.

These husbands to whom Peter exhorts the wives to submit are said to have already rejected the gospel as verbally communicated, whether by the wives or by someone else. Thus the intellectual content of the Christian faith has already been conveyed to these men, but they have refused to give it their assent. Peter is then telling the wives that God may still use their "purity and reverence" as the means by which to impress and convert their husbands, so that they may give assent to what they have already heard. Therefore, this passage presupposes the preaching of the gospel rather than denying its necessity.

Peter continues in verses 5-6:

For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

How did the women make themselves beautiful? "They were submissive to their own husbands." Although Sarah was "a very beautiful woman" (Genesis 12:14) in terms of appearance, Peter cites her case as an example of achieving inner beauty through submissiveness and obedience. Being physically attractive is not enough – Sarah made herself beautiful because she "obeyed Abraham and called him her master."

Just as Christians become the children of Abraham by imitating his faith (Galatians 3:7), women become the daughters of Sarah by imitating her obedience to her husband. Peter does not deny the existence of abusive husbands, but he says, "You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear" (v. 6). The ungodly behavior of some husbands does not excuse the wives from following God's precepts. The biblical

instruction is to "do what is right and do not give way to fear" in the context of being submissive and obedient to one's husband, so that "if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (v. 1-2).

Our next passage on the subject is Ephesians 5:22-24. It says:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

The meaning of this passage is very clear, but many commentators have attempted to subvert it. For example, New Testament scholar Walter L. Liefeld writes as follows:

To submit meant to yield one's own rights. If the relationship called for it, as in the military, the term could connote obedience, but that meaning is not called for here. In fact, the word "obey" does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives, though it does with respect to children (6:1) and slaves (6:5).²²

He admits that the word translated "submit" can mean obedience if the relationship described calls for it, but he says that the marriage relationship does not call for this meaning.

Now, Paul writes, "Wives, submit to your husbands *as to the Lord*" (v. 22), and "*as the church submits to Christ*, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (v. 24). Wives must submit to their husbands as the church must submit to Christ, and Liefeld claims that the submission of the wives does not include obedience. But if this is true, then neither does the submission of the church include obedience. Therefore, according to Liefeld, the wives and the church do not need to be obedient to the husbands or to Christ, but one must be obedient to his superiors in the military.

Instead of assuming that submission does not include obedience, we should allow biblical teaching concerning Christ's absolute authority over the believers and the church to dictate the meaning of submission. And since the believers and the church are to obey Christ in their submission to him, the wives are also to obey their husbands "in everything."

Defining "to submit" as "to yield one's own rights" is problematic in the first place. Since the passage also applies "to submit" to our relationship with Christ, this definition implies that we have a right to defy the Lord, only that we are to surrender such a right. However,

²² *The NIV Study Bible, 10th Anniversary Edition*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1995; Notes on Ephesians 5:22.

since other biblical passages deny that we have a right to defy God, the definition is false.²³

These blunders alone reflect terrible scholarship, and produce blasphemous implications. However, Liefeld's errors do not stop here, since his claim that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives" is both misleading and false.

The claim is misleading since although the word translated "submit" (*hypotassō*) in 5:22 is different from the one translated "obey" (*hypakouō*) in 6:1 and 6:5, both words carry the meaning of obedience. For example, Luke 2:51 uses the word *hypotassō*, but this time it is translated "obedient": "Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with them and was *obedient* [*hypotassō*] to them."

Ephesians 6:1 uses *hypakouō* when it says, "Children, *obey* your parents in the Lord, for this is right." In Ephesians 6:2, Paul assumes that the commandment, "Honor your father and mother," means that children must *obey* their parents. Since the word in Luke 2:51 is *hypotassō*, is Liefeld insinuating that Jesus merely *submitted* to his parents,²⁴ but did not *obey* them? If Jesus had obeyed the commandment, "Honor your father and mother," and this commandment entails *obedience* to one's parents, it follows that Jesus obeyed his parents, and that it is correct to translate *hypotassō* as "obedient" in Luke 2:51.

However, Liefeld's claim is not only misleading – it is simply false. Since he affirms that *hypotassō* is correctly translated "submit" in 5:22 and that *hypakouō* is correctly translated "obey" in 6:1 and 6:5, his claim that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives" would mean that *hypakouō* is never used in Scripture when referring to wives. But 1 Peter 3:5-6 applies the word *hypakouō* to Sarah:

For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were *submissive* [*hypotassō*] to their own husbands, like Sarah, who *obeyed* [*hypakouō*] Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.²⁵

Since Sarah was the *wife* of Abraham, and she *obeyed* (*hypakouō*) her husband, and since the wives are told in this passage to imitate her obedience, it necessarily follows that *hypakouō* is being equally applied to all wives. This passage applies *hypakouō* to Sarah as a *wife*, and by extension to all *wives*. How then can Liefeld assert that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives"? In any case, whether *hypakouō* or *hypotassō* is used, the Bible teaches that wives must obey their husbands.

²³ *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*: "to arrange under, to subordinate; to subject, put in subjection; to subject oneself, to obey; to submit to one's control; to yield to one's admonition or advice"; p. 645.

²⁴ That is, submission as defined by Liefeld – as something less than obedience.

²⁵ Submission and obedience are interchangeable in this verse: "They were *submissive* to their own husbands, like Sarah, who *obeyed* Abraham..."

Wives may protest that this is difficult to do, but it is arguable that the husband's duty is even more challenging: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). The command is not for the husbands to merely show affection to their wives, but to love them to the death, and cherish her more than his own life and welfare. To the extent that one does not possess such love for his wife, he is less than a biblical man. Our estimation of a man should never rise higher than his love for God, the Bible, and his wife.

It may be true that many men are difficult to obey, but it is also true that many women are difficult to love. However, just as God empowers Christian men to love their wives as Christ loves his church, he empowers Christian women to obey their husbands as the church ought to obey Christ. In any case, each person is accountable to God regardless of what the other does, as the apostle Peter affirms (1 Peter 3:1-7). That a husband is unloving does not excuse the wife's disobedience, and a husband must love his wife regardless of her shortcomings.

A popular objection to the biblical authority structure for the family comes from a misuse of Galatians 3:28, and argues that the verse speaks against all gender "inequality" or distinctions: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Since there is "neither...male nor female" in Christ, some make the argument that there should be no role distinction or difference in authority within the marriage relationship.

However, this cannot be the intent of the verse, since elsewhere Paul prescribes role distinctions and recognizes differences in authority between husbands and wives and masters and slaves, saying, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord," and "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ" (Ephesians 5:22, 6:5). Therefore, Galatians 3:28 does not abolish all gender distinctions, and it does not contradict or nullify those biblical passages teaching the male headship of the family.

When we read the verse in its context, it becomes obvious that it only refers to the equality of every elect individual in his ready access to justification by faith:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

The verse does not teach social or gender equality at all, but it teaches a spiritual equality among the elect. All those whom God has chosen to receive salvation have equal access to justification through Christ by faith, whether they are men or women, Jews or non-Jews, masters or slaves. Gender, race, and social status are irrelevant to one's access to salvation through Christ by faith, although only the elect will obtain it (Romans 11:7).

The verse carries no reference to gender equality in any other setting, and has no relevance to role distinctions among male and female.²⁶

We have examined several passages that affirm male leadership in the marriage relationship, but there are many more that assert or imply the divinely instituted authority structure in the family as expounded above. Elizabeth Handford writes, "If you are intellectually honest, you have to admit that it is impossible to find a single loophole, a single exception, an 'if' or 'unless.' The Scriptures say, without qualification...that a woman ought to obey her husband."²⁷ Paul says that a wife must obey her husband, "so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:5); a disobedient wife brings shame to the kingdom of God.

THE FALL OF MAN

Adam was created in the divine image, and in the beginning he was good and upright (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Then God placed him in Eden to work the land, and commanded him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17)

But Satan came in the form of a serpent, deceived the woman into eating from the tree, and she in turn gave Adam fruit from the tree to eat. In this manner, both of them sinned against God (Genesis 3:1-13; 1 Timothy 2:14). Then God pronounced a curse upon them that included pain, toil, and death (Genesis 3:16-19), and he expelled the two from Eden (Genesis 3:23). Thus man fell from his original estate.

Sin produced devastating effects on humanity. The FEDERAL HEADSHIP of Adam refers to his role as the representative of all mankind in Eden. Scripture teaches that when he sinned, he acted on the behalf of all his descendants in the mind of God.²⁸ Therefore, when Adam fell into sin, all of humanity fell with him: "...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men...the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men..." (Romans 5:12, 18).

²⁶ Richard W. Hove, *Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute*; Crossway Books, 1999.

²⁷ Elizabeth Rice Handford, *Me? Obey Him?*; Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1994; p. 31.

²⁸ To be more precise, he represented only every member belonging to the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, which is every member of the human race except Christ. Christ was Adam's descendant in the sense that he took on human attributes at his incarnation, but he was sinless, born without imputed guilt or inherited corruption. This confirms that the effects of Adam's sin are sovereignly imputed to his descendants, and not passed on by his physical relation to them. Christ himself was the federal head of the elect, and the Scripture calls him another "Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Adam represented the human race in Eden as a "federal head" and not an "organic head." All of humanity is condemned by his sin not because of its physical relation to him, but because Adam represented humanity in the mind of God; that is, God sovereignly determined that Adam represented all of humanity in Eden.²⁹ Therefore, every person conceived after Adam is condemned by inherited guilt even before the individual has an opportunity to commit any personal sins. When Adam sinned, all of humanity sinned; when Adam came under condemnation, all of humanity came under condemnation (Romans 5:18).

The term ORIGINAL SIN refers to this inherited guilt rather than the sin committed by Adam. I agree with Wayne Grudem that the term is misleading.³⁰ Alternatives may include "original guilt" and "inherited sin," but "original guilt" may be misunderstood as referring to the sin of Adam, and "inherited sin" may be misunderstood as referring to a transmission of guilt based on our physical relation to Adam. But as Adam was our representative in the mind of God, so is his guilt imputed to us in the mind of God. Thus IMPUTED GUILT is a more accurate term, and makes a good parallel to the IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS that the elect receive by faith in the work of Christ.

Other than Romans 5:12-19, the following biblical verses also point to the imputed guilt we have received from Adam:

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5)

Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies. (Psalm 58:3)

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22)³¹

Not only did we inherit from Adam the guilt of sin, but we also inherited from him a sinful nature. This means that not only are we guilty in God's sight because of Adam's sin, but we also possess a disposition to sin and to rebel against God's laws. Grudem uses the term INHERITED CORRUPTION to designate this sinful disposition that we have received from Adam.³² Many people favor the teaching of secular philosophy that human

²⁹ Some people may object that it was unfair for God to have chosen Adam as our federal head without our assent. Once again, the answer is that since God is the sole moral authority, everything that he does is just by definition.

³⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994; p. 494-495.

³¹ This verse does not teach universal salvation or universal atonement. In fact, given that Scripture elsewhere denies universal salvation, the verse by necessity teaches particular atonement with Christ as the federal head of the elect. Adam represented every member in his group, and all of humanity died under him. Christ also represented every member in his group, and every member in this group were made alive. However, not every member of the human race would be saved; therefore, Christ did not represent every member of the human race, but only the elect.

³² Grudem, p. 496.

beings are born with a disposition toward good; however, the Bible teaches otherwise. Proverbs 22:15 says, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child." Paul states that we all followed our "sinful *nature*" before God regenerated us, and that "we were *by nature* objects of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3).

Many people resist the biblical teaching on imputed guilt and inherited corruption. Even some professing Christians would deny that they have ever sinned.³³ They may admit to having done a number of things out of their "human weaknesses," and that they have made "mistakes," but they insist that it would be an exaggeration to label what they have done as "sins." The problem is that their definition of sin falls short of the definition given in Scripture.

The Bible defines sin as the transgression of God's moral law: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). A person sins when he fails to do what God commands him to do, or when he does what God prohibits him from doing. Now, if sin is a violation of God's moral law, then whether a particular action is sinful must be defined by its relation to this law, that is, to see whether a violation has indeed occurred. And since the moral law of God addresses all areas of thought and conduct either by explicit command or by necessary inference, our thoughts and actions are never morally neutral (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Jesus makes it clear that each moral command from God does not only govern a person's actions, but also his thoughts. Murder does not include only the physical act of killing another human being without biblical justification,³⁴ but it is also a sin of the mind:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matthew 5:21-22)

Likewise, the moral law prohibiting adultery applies not only to the physical act of sexual infidelity, but adultery is also a sin of the mind: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

Jesus explains that sins proceed from the mind: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly" (Mark 7:21-22). What appears to be physical sins are in fact first conceived in the mind; therefore, although not all sins of the mind result in physical expression, all physical sins imply prior sins of the mind. Some people commit fewer physical sins than others, but all of us often displease God in our

³³ Of course, these are not genuine Christians.

³⁴ To kill a human being with biblical justification is not murder, such as the execution of a violent criminal.

thoughts. In addition, Jesus says in Matthew 12:36, "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken." How many of us have never uttered even one "careless word"?

Paul writes that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and John says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us....If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives" (1 John 1:8, 10). Psalm 130:3-4 indicates that unless God forgives some of us, no one can be justified in his presence: "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared." Therefore, no one can say that he is sinless before God.

Not only is every person guilty from birth because of the imputation of Adam's sin, but every person has inherited from Adam a sinful disposition, which causes him to defy God in thought and in action throughout his life. The result is that every man is headed for eternal damnation unless there is some sort of an intervention.

Sin has wrought considerable damage in the human person. Some people go as far as to argue that although God had created Adam in the divine image, the Fall had so marred and distorted it so that what Adam passed on to his offspring was no longer the image of God, but the image of man. Proponents of this view often make their argument from Genesis 5:1-3, which says, "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them 'man.' When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth."

However, the passage does not indicate that the image was so altered or damaged that it was no longer the image of God. It says that God made Adam in the image of God, and then Adam in turn had an offspring in the image of Adam. If $A = B$ and $B = C$, then $A = C$. The passage does not state if the image had changed or how it had changed. Its intent is to portray the continuation of God's image in humankind rather than its abolition. If the image had remained the same in Adam, then of course his offspring was also made in the image of God.

Other biblical passages indicate that God's image in man has indeed remained intact. Generations after the time of Adam, God said to Noah that murder was punishable by death because "in the image of God has God made man" (Genesis 9:6). The apostle James likewise reasons that it is wrong to curse other human beings because they "have been made in God's likeness" (James 3:9).

Appealing to the image of God in man would be illegitimate if man no longer exists as God's image, but these two instances of appealing to the image of God in man are obviously authoritative and legitimate, since the first comes from God and the second comes from an apostle. Also, if man is defined by the image of God, then man would no longer be man if this image is so marred or distorted from its original form that it can no

longer be called God's image. Therefore, we must conclude that man continues to exist as the image of God.

However, this does not mean that the image of God in man was completely unharmed by sin. After the fall of man, and as early as Genesis 6:5, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." This verse provides an apt description of man's sinful nature, that it is the "inclination of the thoughts" toward evil. Paul says that to gratify "the cravings of our sinful nature" is to follow "its desires and thoughts" (Ephesians 2:3). Likewise, Jesus says, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19).

Thus the Bible defines the sinful nature in man as the evil disposition of the mind, or the disposition to think and act contrary to the precepts of Scripture. All the descendants of Adam except Christ have inherited such a disposition:

Those who live according to the *sinful nature* have their *minds* set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. (Romans 8:5-7)

The god of this age has *blinded the minds* of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Once you were alienated from God and were *enemies in your minds* [as shown by]³⁵ your evil behavior. (Colossians 1:21)

Among other things, and in accordance with the above, the Bible portrays sin as a lapse in rationality. Ecclesiastes 7:25 mentions "the stupidity of wickedness,"³⁶ and Proverbs 6:32 says, "one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense" (NASB). Speaking of those who refuse to worship the true God, Paul writes, "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22). Rebellion against God ultimately makes no sense. Insofar as one disobeys the Scripture, he is deficient in judgment and understanding. On the other hand, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (Psalm 111:10).

The implication of these verses is that although the intellectual equipment of the unbeliever remains in existence, the sinful disposition of his mind causes him to reason from false premises. His mind is biased against the truth of God, and causes him to select the wrong first principles with which to construct his worldview. The result is a

³⁵ This is the alternate rendering from the NIV footnotes.

³⁶ An alternate translation is "the wickedness of stupidity." Either translation relates the evil in man to his diminished or inconsistent rationality.

comprehensively false and delusional view of all reality. Even if the unbeliever were to begin from true premises, such as biblical propositions, his sinful mind would still err in reasoning, and produces false conclusions through fallacious deductions.³⁷

This corresponds to an earlier statement in this book that all non-Christians are intellectually defective. Their thinking is controlled by biases and fallacies so that they consistently form conclusions that are hostile to God. Recall that it is the rational mind of man that reflects his likeness to God; therefore, that evil has affected the intellect of man means that it has penetrated the core of his being. The above shows that although man still retains his likeness to God in that he still possesses a rational mind, this rationality has been so damaged that man is now born with a disposition toward evil. The destructive consequences of sin on the mind is called the NOETIC EFFECTS OF SIN.

To understand the redemptive plan of God, we need to grasp the extent to which man has fallen. The effect of sin on the spiritual aspect of man is more than that of a crippling blow, but a fatal one. The unregenerate are not only spiritually sick and blind (Luke 5:31; Matthew 15:14), but they are spiritually dead. And since they are spiritually dead, they are completely helpless when it comes to spiritual operations. Ecclesiastes 9:3 says, "Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives" (NASB), and the prophet Jeremiah observes, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jeremiah 17:9). Man in his unregenerate condition is here described as evil, insane, and incurable. Just as a dead person cannot request or respond to any assistance, a sinner cannot attain to or prepare for salvation by his own will or effort, and in himself he cannot even decide to repent or accept mercy from God.

The biblical verses indicating that the unbeliever is spiritually dead include the following:

But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." (Matthew 8:22)

"For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate...."But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Luke 15:24, 32)

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. (John 5:21)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made

³⁷ This means that the unbeliever can never discover truth by himself, and even if given the truth, he will fail to grasp it or acknowledge its implications. Thus Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3), and such a new birth must be initiated and completed by God without any cooperation from man.

us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:1, 4-5)

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. (1 John 3:14)

Thus the Bible teaches what is called the TOTAL DEPRAVITY of man; however, the term may be misleading. It does not intend to say that every human being is as evil as he can be, but it means that the damage that sin has effected in man is comprehensive and pervasive, so that every part of the human person has been affected by evil.

This damage is of such an extent that man is spiritually dead, and thus he is helpless to even cooperate with God when it comes to salvation. This means that unless the unbelievers experience regeneration, or spiritual resurrection, they will never recognize the truth of the gospel message, and they will never accept Christ. However, since they cannot effect or facilitate their own spiritual regeneration, the new birth occurs only by the sovereign grace of God.

5. CHRIST

Although God alone determines human destiny by choosing to save some and condemn all others, he saves his elect by means of producing within them faith in Christ. This means that one's destiny is revealed by what he thinks about Christ. Depending on the degree and manner of deviation from biblical revelation, holding to a false view of Christ may result in eternal damnation. Therefore, we must study the biblical doctrine of Christ with care and reverence, rejecting any position that compromises or distorts what the Scripture teaches about him.

In this chapter, I will begin with a discussion on the person of Christ with an emphasis on his dual nature. We will then consider several significant points about his life and work, especially pertaining to his work of atonement. The chapter concludes with some comments on the supremacy of Christ and its implications for Christian living and world religions.

THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Biblical Christianity holds that Christ possesses two natures, that he is both divine and human. He exists along with God the Father in eternity as the second person of the Trinity, but took upon himself a human nature in the INCARNATION. The result compromised or confused neither the divine nor the human nature, so that Christ was fully God and fully man, and he will remain in this condition forever. The two natures of Christ subsisting in one person is called the HYPOSTATIC UNION.

Some people allege that this doctrine generates a contradiction; therefore, before providing the biblical data for this doctrine, we will first defend its logical consistency.

Recall our earlier discussion on the Trinity. The historic doctrinal formulation of the Trinity says, "God is one in essence and three in person." This proposition entails no contradiction. For there to be a contradiction, we must affirm that "A is non-A." In our case, this translates into, "God is one in essence and three in essence," or "God is one in person and three in person." To affirm that God is one and three (not one) at the same time and in the same sense is self-contradictory. However, our formulation of the doctrine says that God is one in one sense and three in a different sense: "God is one in essence and three in person." Moreover, although each of the three persons fully participates in the one Godhead, the doctrine does not turn into tritheism since there is still only one God and not three.

The "essence" in the above formulation refers to the divine attributes, or the very definition of God, so that all three persons of the Godhead completely fulfill the definition of deity. But this does not imply tritheism because the very definition of deity includes the ontological attribute of the Trinity, so that each member is not an

independent God. The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct "persons" because they represent three centers of consciousness within the Godhead. Therefore, although all three fully participate in the divine essence so as to make them one God, these three centers of consciousness render them three persons within this one Godhead.

In a similar way, the doctrinal formulation for the personhood and incarnation of Christ states that he is one in one sense, and two in a different sense. That is, he is one in *person*, but two in *natures*.

To clarify this doctrinal formulation, we need to define the terms and relate them to the doctrinal formulation of the Trinity. The way "nature" is used in the doctrinal formulation of the incarnation is similar to the way "essence" is used in the doctrinal formulation of the Trinity. They refer to the definition of something, and the definition of something in turn refers to the attributes or properties something. Personhood is again defined by the consciousness or intellect. Now, the definition of God includes the ontological attribute of the Trinity, and therefore there is only one God although there are three divine persons who share fully and equally in the same set of attributes that define deity.

In the incarnation, God the Son took upon himself the nature of man; that is, he added to his person the set of attributes that define man. He did so without mingling the two natures, so that both sets of attributes remained independent. Thus, his divine nature was not diminished by his human nature, and his human nature was not deified by his divine nature. This formulation also protects the immutability of God the Son, since the human nature did not modify his divine nature at all.

The objection that divine and human attributes necessarily contradict one another when possessed by the same person fails to take into account that the two sets of attributes are independent from each other in God the Son. For example, Christ was not omniscient according to his human attributes, but he was omniscient according to his divine attributes, and this remains true even to this day. His divine attributes has not deified his human attributes.

This doctrinal formulation of the incarnation is immune to the charge of contradiction, since we do not claim that Christ is one and two at the same time and in the same sense. What we assert is that Christ is one person with two sets of attributes. Since this formulation does not generate a logical contradiction, it is established as true if we can show that Christ is both God and man through biblical exegesis.

We will first consider a number of passages indicating the DEITY of Christ. At the beginning of his Gospel, the apostle John refers to Jesus Christ as the *logos*, or the *Word*:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

Verse 1 begins by asserting the preexistence of Christ, saying that he had existed before the creation event. Christ himself confessed his preexistence in John 8, saying, "I tell you the truth...before Abraham was born, I am!" (v. 58). The word *God* (Greek: *theos*) in this verse refers to the Father, and "the Word was with God" indicates that Christ is not identical to the Father in terms of his personhood. Nevertheless, he is not less than God in terms of his attributes, since the verse continues to say, "the Word was God." This is an explicit statement attributing deity to Jesus Christ. The words, "He was with God in the beginning" in verse 2 again assert his preexistence and the fact that he is distinguishable from the Father.

Verse 3 credits Christ as the agent of creation, saying, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." This agrees with the christology of Paul, who writes in Colossians 1:16, "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." Christ not only created the universe, but he is now sustaining its very existence. Paul says that "in him all things hold together" (v. 17). It is through Christ that God "made the universe," and it is also Christ who is "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:2-3).

Colossians 2:9 says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." Titus 2:13 says, "We wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." In Hebrews 1:3, we read, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." Hebrews 1:8 makes a messianic application of Psalm 45:6-7, so that God says to Christ, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom." Thus God the Father himself declares that Jesus is God, and says that his rule will "last for ever and ever." Finally, Paul writes in Philippians 2:6 that Christ, "being in very nature God," took on human attributes.

Now we will turn to some passages that indicate the HUMANITY of Christ. After strongly asserting the deity of Christ, the apostle John writes in his Gospel, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Hebrews 2:14 says, "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..." Paul is very explicit about Christ's humanity when he writes in 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, *the man* Christ Jesus."

Various passages in the Bible indicate that *in his human nature*, Jesus had genuine limitations. For example, he was "tired...from the journey" in John 4:6, hungry in Matthew 21:18, and thirsty in John 19:28. Most significantly, "he suffered death" (Hebrews 2:9) to purchase salvation for his elect.

Some passages in the Bible affirm or imply both the deity and humanity of Christ. For example, John 5:18 says that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus because "he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." They saw him as a man, but they realized that he was claiming to be God. John 8:56-59 describes another such conflict:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

The people recognized that in his human life, Jesus was not yet fifty years old, but he claimed that he personally knew Abraham. Those who heard him did not dispute his humanity, but they also realized that his words amounted to a claim to deity.

Matthew 22:41-45 also affirms that Jesus was both God and man:

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?"

The Pharisees acknowledged that the Christ would be the son of David, and if the son of David, Christ would be human. However, while he was "speaking by the Spirit," so that he could not have erred, David called Christ "Lord" as a designation of deity. Therefore, the Christ would be both the human descendent and the divine Lord of David – Christ would be both God and man.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Jesus Christ was miraculously conceived in the virgin Mary. As Matthew 1:18 explains, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." Verse 20 emphasizes that she was not impregnated by a man, but that the child was "from the Holy Spirit." Christ was "born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4), but rather than being conceived by the union of a man and a woman, he was conceived by "the power of the Most High" (Luke 1:35). Thus, the person born was both divine and human.

Unlike all other human beings after Adam, Jesus had no imputed guilt or inherited corruption. Now, the Bible does not say that imputed guilt and inherited corruption come from only the father, and we also know that Mary was sinful like the rest of humanity. Although the virgin conception testifies that he was no ordinary human being, by itself it was insufficient to protect the child from all contamination. Therefore, the sinlessness of Christ cannot be due to the virgin conception alone, but it was by God's sovereign decree that no guilt was imputed on Christ and that no corruption was inherited by him. The "power of the Most High" did not only cause Christ's conception without a human father,

but also kept the child from both the legal guilt of Adam and the corrupt nature resulting from his sin. This is so that the child may be rightly called, "the holy one" (Luke 1:35).

Some people argue that Christ must have been subject to both error and sin simply by being a human person; complete immunity to sin would mean that he was not genuinely human. The tendencies to make mistakes and commit sins seem to be intrinsic to what it means to be human. Therefore, to say that Christ was human means that he was also prone to error and sin. If Christ was not subject to these shortcomings, he must not have been human. After all, these people claim, "To err is human."

However, this view forgets the fact that the entire human race exists in a depraved state that is different from the original condition of man. Adam and Eve were not created sinful, and yet they were fully human. This means that sinfulness is not an essential human attribute. That our sinful state is a universal factor of human life prevents some from seeing that it is in fact abnormal. In other words, it is possible to be a human being without imputed guilt and inherited corruption; however, only Adam, Eve, and Jesus were born without sin.

This relates to what Paul says about Christ as the "last Adam" or the "second man" (1 Corinthians 15:45, 47). The "first man" Adam as a federal head represented every member belonging to the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, namely, the human race. The "second man" Jesus was also a federal head, and represented every member belonging to the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, namely, the elect.

As for the ministry of Jesus, it was characterized by preaching, teaching, and healing:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. (Matthew 9:35)

But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." (Luke 4:43)

His preaching and miracles had drawn increasing hostility from his enemies. After several years of ministry, he was betrayed by his disciple Judas into the hands of those who wished to kill him. After a time of severe and unjust treatment by the Jewish officials and Romans soldiers, he was sentenced to death through crucifixion by Pilate. Jesus died on the cross, and even his death testified to who he was: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" (Mark 15:39).

Jesus had a real human body, and his death was literal and physical. The Gospels make it clear that he had in fact died:

The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

The Roman soldiers were well-trained, and doubtless had performed numerous crucifixions before this one; they could have easily determined whether their victims were dead or alive. When they found that Jesus "was already dead" (John 19:33), they saw no need to break his legs to quicken his death. But just to be certain, one of the soldiers ran a spear into his side, which brought a "sudden flow of blood and water" (John 19:34), proving his death from a medical standpoint.

Just as the death of Christ was literal and physical, so was his resurrection. The Bible records that Christ rose from the dead on the third day of his death. He was raised with the same body that he had before, but it was changed and enhanced. Paul writes that Christians will also receive such a body when Jesus returns and raises the dead: "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable" (1 Corinthians 15:42). In any case, the resurrected or "glorified" body could still manifest and function in the physical realm, so that when Jesus appeared to his disciples, he said to them, "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39).

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples numerous times over a period of forty days, showing them "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3, KJV) that he was alive. Then, the Bible records that he was taken up into heaven and was given a position of authority by the Father: "After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight" (Acts 1:9); "After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19).

THE WORK OF CHRIST

The work of Jesus Christ is usually characterized by the ATONEMENT that he had obtained for the elect. The nature of the atonement is one of penal substitutionary death. Paul writes, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), but instead of requiring our own death, God sent Jesus Christ to pay for our sins by bearing our guilt and dying on the cross in our stead.

One question regarding the atonement is whether the substitutionary death of Christ was necessary to redeem sinners. Two significant answers to this question are the HYPOTHETICAL NECESSITY and the CONSEQUENTIAL ABSOLUTE NECESSITY views of the atonement. John Murray explains these two views as follows:

The view known as that of *hypothetical necessity* maintains that God could have forgiven sin and saved his elect without atonement or satisfaction – other means were open to God to whom all things are possible. But the way of the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God was the way which God in his grace and sovereign wisdom chose because this is the way in which the greatest number of advantages concur and the way in which grace is more marvellously exhibited....

The other view we call *consequent absolute necessity*. The word "consequent" in this designation points to the fact that God's will or decree to save any is of free and sovereign grace. To save lost men was not of absolute necessity but of the sovereign good pleasure of God. The terms "absolute necessity," however, indicate that God, having elected some to everlasting life out of his mere good pleasure, was under the necessity of accomplishing this purpose through the sacrifice of his own Son, a necessity arising from the perfections of his own nature.¹

If only these two options are available, consequent absolute necessity would be the preferable one. The atonement was not necessary in the sense that God did not have to save anyone at all. Peter writes, "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell" (2 Peter 2:4). Just as it was not necessary for a loving God to save the angels from sin, neither was he required by his own nature or anything external to himself to save man. Nevertheless, because of his love for the elect, God sent Jesus Christ to save sinners even though he was not required to do so.

Although it was not necessary for God to save sinners, once the decision was made, the death of Jesus Christ became necessary to pay the price of man's sins. In reference to his death, Jesus prayed, "My Father, *if it is possible*, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). He asked that if it is somehow possible, to let the effects intended by the atonement be accomplished another way, while insisting that whatever was God's will to be done. After praying this way, "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him" (Luke 22:43). The Father's will was for Jesus to go through with the work of atonement, thus implying that the death of Christ was inevitable in order to achieve the intended results. After his resurrection, Jesus said to his disciples, "Was it not *necessary* for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26, NASB), implying that it was indeed the only way.

We may press further to inquire as to why the death of Christ was the only way. If there were no atonement, everyone would have to die for his own sins (John 8:24), and the Bible indicates that the punishment would be torturous and endless. One can be free from receiving just punishment only if another were to die in his place. But one sinful human being cannot die to redeem another, since any sinner who suffers the wrath of God would

¹ John Murray, *Redemption – Accomplished and Applied*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955; p. 11-12.

only be doing so because of his own sins. Thus atonement requires a perfect and innocent offering. Although God had instituted the practice of animal sacrifice under the Old Covenant, it was only to anticipate the atoning death of Christ, seeing that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Therefore, Christ was the only acceptable and sufficient sacrifice.

Consequent absolute necessity is the "classic Protestant position,"² but there is a better answer to the question of the necessity of the atonement. From the perspective of supralapsarianism,³ the decree to redeem the elect is logically prior to the decree of the fall of man:

1. The election of some sinners to salvation in Christ; the reprobation of the rest of sinful mankind.
2. The application of the redemptive work of Christ to the elect sinners.
3. The redemption of the elect sinners by the work of Christ.
4. The fall of man.
5. The creation of the world and man.

The redemptive work of Christ was not a reaction to the sin of man; rather, God decreed the fall of man so that the atonement could occur.

Christ was "chosen *before* the creation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20) to be the lamb of God. Paul writes that "eternal life" was "promised *before* the beginning of time" to "God's elect" (Titus 1:1-2), and that God chose those whom he would redeem "*before* the creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). God determined the identity of the elect, chose to redeem them, and selected Christ as the redeemer *before* the creation of the world.

Since God is eternal or timeless, it means that the possibility never existed that God would not redeem his elect through the substitutionary death of Christ. In fact, the plan of redemption was logically a certainty even before God decreed the fall of man. Therefore, given the supralapsarian order of the eternal decrees, the substitutionary atonement of Christ was an ABSOLUTE NECESSITY.

Although many people tend to associate the redemptive work of Christ only with his death and resurrection, it is impossible to ignore the other events of his life when discussing redemption. The actions that Christ performed to save his elect from sin were not limited to the events after his arrest, but include those what were before it. We should consider his entire life as one whose purpose was to redeem those whom God had given to him. For example, even his very act of taking on human attributes to become like us and identified with us is part of his redemptive work.

Therefore, some theologians distinguish between the ACTIVE OBEDIENCE and the PASSIVE OBEDIENCE of Christ on our behalf. Both of these terms suggest that he came to

² Ibid., p. 11.

³ We have previously established the truth of supralapsarianism as opposed to infralapsarianism.

succeed at the point where Adam had failed, namely, to live in perfect obedience toward God. Paul writes, "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:8). These two terms designate the two aspects of obedience through which Christ paid for the sins of the elect and achieved for them perfect righteousness.

Christ's active obedience refers to his perfect adherence to the laws of God on our behalf. He completely satisfied the moral demands of God, who in turn credits such righteousness to those who would believe in Christ. Romans 5:19 says, "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." Many people tend to neglect this aspect of Christ's redemptive work, but it is a necessary part of what he has done for the elect.

To hold that Christ only needed to die for the sins of the elect to redeem them fails to explain why he did so many other things, such as obeying the laws of God, enduring severe temptations, performing numerous good works and acts of mercy, and living a uniquely righteous life. The truth is that besides saving us from sin, Christ also merited a positive righteousness on our behalf.

This helps explain why only a short period of time in the life of Jesus consists of active public ministry, while before that he lived in relative obscurity. Before his public ministry, he was not only preparing for his preaching work and waiting for the right timing. The redemption of the elect depends not only on his final years or days, but also on the obedience and righteousness that he demonstrated throughout his life as the federal head of the elect. Through what he had done before his ministry, during his ministry, and in his death and resurrection, Jesus secured a perfect righteousness to be credited to those who would believe on him.

Christ's passive obedience refers to his suffering the penalty of the sins of the elect. Sin demands punishment, and the just penalty of defiance against God is endless torment in hell. Since the punishment is endless, there is no escape or restoration for those who would come under the wrath of God. Someone else would have to die in place of the sinner for the sinner to go free and for God's justice to be satisfied at the same time. However, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and so no human being qualifies to die for the sins of another, since each one is himself guilty of sin, and would be receiving just punishment only for his own sins if he were to suffer under the wrath of God.

The only solution is for a sinless human being to die for another, and so to truly suffer the penalty of sin that he does not himself deserve. This is what Jesus has done for the elect: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Although Jesus was without sin (Hebrews 4:15), he suffered as a sinner as God sovereignly imputed the guilt of the elect upon him. Thus those whom he acted as a federal head – namely, the elect – would receive his perfect righteousness also by imputation.

Jesus suffered many things during his earthly life. These include the intense temptations that he experienced from Satan (Luke 4:1-14), the opposition against him from religious leaders (Hebrews 12:3), and the very fact that he had to endure numerous human limitations and problems such as hunger and weariness, things to which he was impervious in his divine nature. Isaiah 53:3 says, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering," and the writer of Hebrews states the following:

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering....Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. (Hebrews 2:10, 5:8)

His sufferings intensified from the time of his arrest to his death on the cross. This is the portion of time most have in mind when they refer to the suffering of Christ:

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. (Matthew 27:27-31)

Although what Jesus had to suffer here was painful and humiliating, and vastly different from the treatment appropriate to God the Son, he nevertheless endured all of it for his elect. But it was not over, for after all this, "they led him away to crucify him" (v. 31). Crucifixion was a way of inflicting death that produced extreme suffering for the victim.

Even more terrible than the physical pain was the spiritual or psychological suffering of bearing the guilt of the elect. Jesus was perfectly holy and without sin; he had never felt the effects of sin upon one's consciousness. But it was at that time that God imputed upon him the entire weight of the guilt of the elect:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all....Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:6, 12)

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

Some people may wonder why one person's death is sufficient to pay for the sins of many. The answer is found in Romans 5:15, 18-19:

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Just as Adam represented the entire human race when he sinned, so Jesus represented the elect in his perfect righteousness and atoning work.

As for why such a short time of punishment was sufficient to take away the sins of so many individuals, and was accepted as a sufficient substitute for the endless punishment of sinners, we only need to consider the value of the sacrifice and the intensity of the suffering. The perfection of Christ was such that God accepted his once for all sacrifice and his suffering on behalf of the elect as sufficient to have obtained "eternal redemption" for them: "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12); "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

In any case, it was God's sovereign acceptance of the atonement that determined and proved its sufficiency. Just as Adam was an appropriate and legitimate federal head and representative of those who were identified with him in the mind of God (the human race), so Jesus was an appropriate and legitimate federal head and representative of those who were identified with him in the mind of God (the elect). Ultimately, the atonement was sufficient and efficacious because it satisfied God's own standard of justice.

As for the extent or scope of the atonement, many people assume that Jesus died for every human being; however, the Bible teaches that he only died for those whom God had chosen for salvation, that is, the elect. This doctrine is often called LIMITED ATONEMENT, but the term is misleading, since although only specific individuals have been chosen for salvation, Christ indeed saves them to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25). Thus, many advocates of this biblical doctrine maintain that it is more properly called

PARTICULAR ATONEMENT or DEFINITE ATONEMENT. I consider the term EFFECTIVE SPECIFIC ATONEMENT to be even more descriptive, as the following exposition of the doctrine will show.

The popular challenge to the biblical teaching of definite atonement is the view saying that the work of Christ has made salvation merely possible for everyone, but actual for no one. Salvation is applied to a person when he chooses to appropriate for himself the benefits of the redemptive work of Christ. However, Scripture teaches that Christ has successfully achieved actual salvation from sin for everyone for whom his redemptive work was intended, and that he only intended to secure salvation for the elect.

The doctrine of definite atonement is closely connected to God's election of individuals for salvation. While I will deal with the doctrine of election in more detail in the next chapter, it has already been sufficiently established in previous chapters of this book so that we may proceed with the assumption that it is indeed what the Bible teaches. That is, God in eternity has chosen a number of individuals to be saved, while the rest were rejected. Definite atonement teaches that Christ came to die for only the elect, that is, these whom God has chosen for salvation.

If Christ had paid the price for all the sins of every human being, then why would anyone be condemned? Indeed, there are those who teach that in his work of atonement, Christ had completely paid the price for the sins of every human being, and therefore no one will suffer damnation. This position of UNIVERSALISM is blatantly false, since Scripture teaches that many will be sent to hell for their sins on the day of judgment. The Scripture teaches that there is an eternal hell and that many people will in fact be sent there. Below are only several examples:

If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into *eternal fire*. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into *the fire of hell*. (Matthew 18:8-9)

You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? (Matthew 23:33)

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the *eternal fire* prepared for the devil and his angels....Then they will go away to *eternal punishment*, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matthew 25:41, 46)

In hell, where he was *in torment*, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am *in agony in this*

fire....Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this *place of torment*." (Luke 16:23-24. 27-28)

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in *the fiery lake of burning sulfur*. This is the second death. (Revelation 21:8)

But most of the people who oppose the biblical doctrine of definite atonement do not affirm actual universalism; rather, they assert a position that may be called HYPOTHETICAL UNIVERSALISM. They maintain that Christ has made salvation possible for all human beings, and all of them could be saved if they would only believe in the gospel. However, if Christ had indeed paid the price of sin for everyone, then why would anyone go to hell at all? The usual answer is that one must accept by faith what Christ has done, else although the price of sin for the person has been fully paid, God would still condemn him. But this means that God would punish the same sins twice, once on the cross on Christ, and the second time on the person who had committed those sins.

One preacher tried to escape this problem by saying that the only sin for which God will send people to hell is the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ. But this position contradicts biblical passages saying that God will in fact take account of the personal sins of the reprobates:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. (Romans 1:18-19)

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. (Ephesians 5:5-6)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (Colossians 3:5-6)

Also, this view saying that God will only condemn people for their rejection of Christ and not for their personal sins implies that the fundamental and most common sin of unbelief is one that Christ failed to pay for, thus rendering his atoning work desperately incomplete. Another problem is that since the imputed guilt of Adam is by itself sufficient to condemn, this preacher's position implies, perhaps unintentionally, that no one is born with imputed guilt anymore after the completion of Christ's atoning work.

This is an implication that even this preacher may not accept. Nevertheless, at least he realized that the atonement of Christ made a real and full payment for sins, and not merely a potential payment; however, once he insisted on affirming universal atonement, his position became inconsistent and unbiblical.

Actual universalism is clearly false and heretical, but hypothetical universalism appears to many people as the position that best accords with justice, since everybody gets a chance to be saved. But as we have established earlier when discussing man's total depravity (Romans 3:10-12, 23), man is in a state of spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1). If so, there is no possibility that one will have positive faith in Christ if left by himself. This means that unless God chooses who would receive salvation through sovereign election, and redeems them through definite atonement, no one would be saved, since none would accept Christ.

Opponents of definite atonement may claim that although all are spiritually dead in sin, some in fact do respond in faith to Christ, not because they were chosen for salvation, but because they decide to be saved by their own wills. However, the very meaning of spiritual death makes this impossible, since a dead man cannot respond to or cooperate with any assistance, or even request it. Accordingly, the Bible says that faith and repentance are things that God grants as gifts to his elect (Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:25-26), but he does not grant them to everyone, and so "not everyone has faith" (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Since faith in Christ is the only way to salvation, and it is God who chooses to whom he grants faith and repentance, it follows that it is God who chooses the ones who receive salvation, and not the individuals themselves.

For the sake of argument, let us assume for the moment that although all are spiritually dead, some would in fact respond to the gospel in faith by themselves. But this would mean that spiritually dead people require no special grace from God to make the most important spiritual decision in their lives. How then do we explain why one spiritually dead person would accept Christ, while another spiritually dead person fails to do the same? Does it not follow that those who are able to make the positive spiritual decision is more righteous than those who do not? If so, then we will have to say that Christ came to save only the relatively righteous individuals, and not the relatively sinful ones. But this contradicts the premise of the whole gospel.

To say that God exerts an amount of influence on individuals to cause them to believe only delays the problem. Some people appear to require stronger influence from God than others. But if God exerts stronger influence on some people than he does on others, then he is in fact choosing who would be saved, especially if the amount of influence exerted does not exactly correspond to the degree of wickedness in the individuals. On the other hand, if God exerts approximately the same amount of influence on individuals, then once again only the relatively righteous will respond, which again means that Christ came only to save the relatively righteous, a notion that contradicts the teaching of Scripture.

The necessary conclusion is as follows. Given other aspects of scriptural teaching, UNLIMITED ATONEMENT or UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT is impossible. Since the nature of

the atonement involves actual and full payment for sin, universal atonement would necessarily entail universal salvation; however, Scripture teaches that not everyone is saved, but that many people will be lost and suffer endless torment in hell. Therefore, the only scriptural possibility is that in eternity God had selected a definite group of individuals to be saved. Then, in his work of atonement, Christ died for only these individuals, and thus securing actual salvation for every one of them, not making it merely possible. This is why the redemptive work of Christ is an effective and specific atonement.

The above shows that definite atonement is a necessary implication of biblical doctrines that are known to be true. Specifically, the doctrine of election, the atonement as a full payment for sin, and the denial of actual universalism converge to render definite atonement a logical necessity. Therefore, that the atonement is specific and effective appears to be true even without direct scriptural evidence; nevertheless, there are many biblical passages that affirm or imply this doctrine, and we will now turn to some of them. We will also discuss the claim that some biblical passages appear to teach universal atonement.

We begin by repeating from Scripture that the nature of the atonement is one of penal substitution, so that the death of Christ made a real and full payment for the sins of those whom he represented:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which *he bought with his own blood*. (Acts 20:28)

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; *you were bought at a price*. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood *you purchased men for God* from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10)

Christ made a full payment to purchase those for whom he died; therefore, the language of these and other passages like them (Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 1:18-19) excludes the conclusion that he made salvation merely possible for those for whom he died, but that he has made salvation actual for them.

Since Christ was "slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8) in the mind of God, and his death gave him actual legal ownership of all those for whom he died, the

identities of all those who would be saved had been unchangeably determined from eternity. Christ then came in historical time to die for only those individuals.

Another clear indication of definite atonement comes from John 10:14-15, 25-29, where Jesus says the following:

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and *I lay down my life for the sheep....*

I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe *because* you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

Jesus says, "I lay down my life for the sheep," and he says to some, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep." He came to die for the sheep, but some people are not his sheep; therefore, he did not die for every human being. Those who are Christ's sheep belong to him since the Father "has given them to [him]," and all of them will believe the gospel, since he says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." On the other hand, just as the identities of the sheep have already been determined in eternity, there is no possibility that those who are not his sheep would believe, and thus he says, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep." All those whom God has chosen will be saved, and once saved they will never lose their salvation, since Jesus says, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." Thus within several verses, Christ not only teaches the doctrine of definite atonement, but also the doctrines of election, reprobation, and preservation, which we will further discuss in the next chapter.

Opponents of definite atonement claim that some biblical passages appear to teach that the redemptive work of Christ was universal rather than specific. Here I will respond to two such passages:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting *anyone* to perish, but *everyone* to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants *all men* to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as *a ransom for all men* – the testimony given in its proper time. (1 Timothy 2:3-6)

Only the most untrained and naïve exegete would assume without argument that the words "all" and "everyone" in the Bible must always refer to all human beings. We can find endless examples in our daily speech in which the scope of these seemingly universal terms are limited by the context. Nevertheless, for our case to be complete, we will first demonstrate this using biblical examples before examining the above two passages.

Jesus says in Matthew 10:22, "*All men* will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." But the statement does not intend to say that all human beings without exception would hate the disciples of Christ, since at least Christians themselves would love one another. Also, we may assume that those who do not know about Christians cannot hate them. It may be true that the beliefs and practices of even those unbelievers who know nothing about Christians amount to hatred against God and Christians, but this does not seem to be the intent of this verse.

The meaning of the verse becomes clearer when we read the verses that come before and after it to obtain its context:

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (Matthew 10:21-23)

Verses 21 and 23 contain information that restricts the scope of verse 22. It appears that the words "all men" in verse 22 primarily refer to those mentioned in verses 21 and 23. That is, "all men" means all kinds of people, such as the unbelieving members of one's family and those who reject the gospel message upon hearing it.⁴

In Acts 26:4, Paul says, "The Jews *all* know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem." Does he mean that every Jewish person without exception knew him? The next verse says, "They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee" (v. 5). It appears that the "all" in verse 4 is not intended to designate every Jewish person without exception, but all the Jews who are relevant to the situation at hand.

Psalm 8:6 says, "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put *everything* under his feet." Paul applies this verse to Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:27, but he explicitly restricts the meaning of "everything": "For he 'has put everything under his feet.' Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ."

⁴ The meaning of "all men" narrows even more when one considers the historical context of the passage. Jesus was speaking to Christians in the first century, saying that they would not have finished evangelizing the cities of Israel before he would come in judgment to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Romans 8:32 is especially relevant to the atonement, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for *us all* – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Opponents of definite atonement may be tempted to understand "us all" as referring to all human beings without exception, but the above examples have shown that we must not assume this without adequate reason. We must allow the context of the verse to dictate the scope of the words "us all."

Paul indicates in Romans 1:7 that this letter is addressed to the Christians in Rome: "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Unless its immediate context widens the scope to include all human beings without exception, the meaning of "us all" in Romans 8:32 must be restricted by Romans 1:7.

But the verses that surround Romans 8:32 themselves restrict the meaning of "us all" in explicit terms:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, *who have been called according to his purpose*....He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against *those whom God has chosen*? It is God who justifies. (Romans 8:28, 32-33)

It is clear that the words "us all" refer only to "those whom God has chosen," or "God's elect" (NASB). Therefore, verse 32 gives no support to universal atonement; rather, it favors definite atonement.

Another example comes from Acts 2, which begins with a description of what happened on the day of Pentecost:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (v. 1-4)

Peter then rose up to preach, quoting the prophecy of Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on *all people*" (v. 17). We have already established that the words "all" and "everyone" do not always refer to all human beings, but we must allow the context of the relevant verses to restrict the meaning of these words. This simple principle holds whether in biblical hermeneutics or ordinary conversations; it is most foolish and unreasonable to ignore it.

Peter is here speaking within the context of the Spirit's mighty manifestation on the day of Pentecost, saying that God will pour out his Spirit upon "all people." However, the scope of the verse is restricted by the surrounding verses listed below:

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from *every nation under heaven*. (v. 5)

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all *whom the Lord our God will call*." (v. 38-39)

The words "all people" are spoken in the context of addressing people "from every nation under heaven," and thus the universality intended here is one of ethnic universality, not an absolute universality. That is, God would pour out his Spirit upon people from all ethnic backgrounds, and not just the Jews. Verses 38-39 say that the promise of the Spirit is indeed "for all"; however, these words do not signal an absolute universality, but they only apply to "all *whom the Lord our God will call*," thus restricting the promise of the gospel itself to a select group chosen by the sovereign will of God.

We will now return to 2 Peter 3:9 and 1 Timothy 2:3-6, which are two of the favorite passages cited by opponents of definite atonement:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting *anyone* to perish, but *everyone* to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants *all men* to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as *a ransom for all men* – the testimony given in its proper time. (1 Timothy 2:3-6)

2 Peter 1:1 indicates that Peter is addressing "those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours," and 2 Peter 3:8 refers to the "beloved," which is a term designating Christians. Then, verse 9 says, "He is patient with *you*, not wanting *anyone* to perish, but *everyone* to come to repentance." The word "you" here obviously refers to the group to which believers belong, and not the unbelievers. Therefore, the verse is saying that the Lord tarries so that the elect will have time to become Christians.

1 Timothy 2:3-6 says that God "wants all men to be saved," and that Christ "gave himself as a ransom for all men." Now, we have already established that the words "all" and "everyone" do not always refer to all human beings, and we have also established the doctrine of definite atonement by appealing to other biblical passages; therefore, we must

not assume that this passage teaches universal atonement. In fact, since other passages have already made universal atonement impossible, we may assume that this passage does not teach it.

Nevertheless, as with the other passages, there is direct evidence from the context of the passage indicating that Paul does not mean all human beings when he writes "all men." Verses 1 and 2 say, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made *for everyone* – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." Paul says that believers should pray "for everyone," and proceeds to explain that by "everyone," he means even "kings and all those in authority." Therefore, by "everyone," Paul intends to designate kinds or groups of people – Christians are to pray for all sorts of people.

Revelation 5:9-10 was earlier quoted to show that the nature of the atonement involves a real and full purchase by Christ of those for whom he died, but the same verses also suggest that the universality of the atonement is not an absolute universality, but only an ethnic universality:

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you *purchased men* for God *from every tribe and language and people and nation*. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

The Bible consistently teaches that the atonement is universal only in the sense that Christ died for people from every ethnic and social background; none teaches that he died for all human beings. Since this atonement is not merely a potential payment for sins, but an actual payment for sins, those for whom he died will surely be saved. Thus the good news is that "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to *all men*" (Titus 2:11), and not just to the Jews.

The "good news" of Christianity has never been that Christ died to save every human being, but that he died to save people "from every tribe and language and people and nation." The greatness of Christ's atonement is that its effects are unlimited by ethnic and social borders: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This is the good news, and this is how we should understand the biblical passages saying that Christ died for all.

An angel says to Joseph in Matthew 1:21, "[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will *save his people* from their sins." The doctrine of definite atonement takes seriously this verse and many others like it, affirming that Jesus came to actually *save* and not to make salvation merely possible, and that he came to save *his people* and not those whom God had not chosen. Thus the redemptive work of Christ consists of an effective and specific atonement.

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

Paul writes that after Christ suffered a time of great humiliation, God exalted him to the highest place:

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 likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that 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. (Philippians 2:5-11)

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and 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, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:18-23)

Thus the Bible teaches that Christ is in a state of exaltation under the Father unequaled by anyone else:

For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:27-28)

Romans 14:9 says, "Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living." An early Christian confession was, "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3), and Jesus himself tells his disciples in Matthew 28:18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

The *supremacy* of Christ illustrated by the above biblical passages implies the *sufficiency* of Christ. Paul says in Colossians 1:18 that in everything Christ has "the supremacy,"

after which he adds, "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him" (v. 19). This "fullness" includes "every spiritual blessing" (Ephesians 1:3) and "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). There is no blemish or lack in him: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority" (Colossians 2:9-10).

The sufficiency of Christ implies that through him we have "everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), and there is no need to seek other sources of spiritual power and guidance. Indeed, there is no other true source of spiritual power and guidance besides what is available through Christ. Nevertheless, many professing Christians in our day are seeking help from illegitimate sources when the solutions for their problems are readily available through prayer in the name of Jesus and knowledge of the Scripture.

Many people who claim to be Christians nevertheless become involved with occult practices such as astrology, horoscopes, necromancy, and all varieties of divination. But these are forbidden by God:

Do not practice divination or sorcery. (Leviticus 19:26)

Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:31)

I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people. (Leviticus 20:6)

A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads. (Leviticus 20:27)

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12)

Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse. (1 Chronicles 10:13-14)

On the day of judgment, no astrologer or medium can save his followers from hell, and of course he himself will be condemned:

Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by. That is all they can do for you – these you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you. (Isaiah 47:12-15)

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and *witchcraft*; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who *practice magic arts*, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. (Revelation 21:8)

One who seeks spiritual assistance or counsel apart from those sources approved by Scripture becomes a spiritual prostitute, and commits adultery against God. The Bible reserves some of the strongest terms in condemnation against such people. Christians have no business getting involved with extra-biblical spiritual activities, and those who wallow in them make their profession of faith questionable.

Isaiah 8:19 says, "And when they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (NASB). Christians by definition have entrusted all of their lives to God, and therefore the purpose of obtaining guidance is to conform their lives to his will in the first place. Why then should they consult the representatives of Satan on how to order their lives in conformity to the will of God?

Christians must obtain guidance from only the sources approved by Scripture. Of course, one may seek counsel from knowledgeable church leaders, but even their authority and direction are legitimate only to the extent that they are derived from Scripture. Thus in this very real sense, the Scripture alone is sufficient.

People commit spiritual adultery not because they have examined the verbal revelation of God and found it inadequate; rather, they have never taken the effort to gain the wisdom of God on the matter at hand by studying the Scripture. Christ is undoubtedly sufficient

for all of life, but the apostle Peter explains that it is by obtaining *knowledge* about the things of God that we may walk in the provisions that he has given us:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance *through the knowledge* of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness *through our knowledge* of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. (2 Peter 1:2-3)

This is why the study of theology is the most important human activity. However, because of their slothfulness and wickedness, many people prefer to spend time consulting sources that are forbidden by God. Involvement with occult practices is adequate reason for excommunication; negligence in church discipline only allows such abominations to foster and spread.

The *sufficiency* of Christ in turn implies the *exclusivity* of Christ. This means that Christ is the only way to salvation, and that Christianity is the only true religion or worldview

The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name. (Zechariah 14:9)

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:18)

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:12)

All other spiritual leaders are unworthy of worship, and those who accept or demand worship are liars and frauds. All non-Christian religions and worldviews are false, including those that retain the name of Christianity without upholding biblical orthodoxy; all of them lead to eternal damnation and endless punishment in hell.

Jesus calls himself "the way" – there are not many ways to God. Jesus calls himself "the truth" – truth is not relative or changing. There is only one eternal being who is truth, and the New Testament writers identify Christ as this *logos*, or the eternal unchanging principle of reason and order in the universe (John 1:1; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:1-3,

13:8). Therefore, Jesus calls himself "the life" – all other options lead to everlasting death and torment. No one can reject Jesus Christ who at the same time finds God and life; apart from him there is only despair, death, and damnation.

Jesus says in Matthew 12:30, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters." Any religion or worldview that does not affirm total biblical orthodoxy is anti-Christian. Some religions claim to uplift Jesus Christ, but they admire him only as an example of morality or mystical enlightenment. However, the biblical faith demands the affirmation and worship of the complete and unadulterated Christ. This entails belief in his preexistence and deity, virgin birth, incarnation and humanity, earthly life and ministry, atonement through his substitutionary suffering and death, and his physical resurrection.

The Christ of Scripture is God manifested in human flesh. He is fully God and fully man. The apostle John testifies, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. 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). He also gives us a warning in 1 John 4:2-3:

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.

The true Christ is the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Paul gives us a summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, placing great emphasis on the historical nature of Christ's redemptive work:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Faith in the historical Jesus and his work of redemption is of "first importance" (v. 3). The apostle states that it is "by this gospel you are saved," and that we are to "hold firmly" to it. The biblical Christ is not a mystical or ideological figure, but the second person of the Triune God manifested in time and space. His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension were historical events with spiritual significance, and not symbolic or

mythological ones. Peter says, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

There are a number of false religions in which Christ is presented as little more than an ideological symbol or moral example. At most he is recognized as a true prophet, but not as God the Son. But any religion that does not affirm the person and work of Christ in the biblical and historical sense is of the antichrist. A symbolic Christ who is nothing more than an idea and robbed of his redemptive work performed in history cannot save anyone. A Christ who is not fully God and fully man is not the biblical Christ at all.

True Christianity must uphold the supremacy and exclusivity of Christ. However, the founders of some non-Christian religions had declared themselves the latest prophets from God; they claimed that they superseded the authority of Christ and that they had the authority to add to the biblical revelation. Although some of these who came after Christ each claimed to be the final prophet, others arose and declared the previous ones to be obsolete, that they were now the authoritative voice of God to humanity, and that they were the truly enlightened ones.

The student of apologetics or comparative religion should honor Christ by examining the errors and contradictions within these false systems of thought, and thoroughly annihilate their claims to truth. All false religions such as Islam, Mormonism, and Buddhism are easily demonstrated to be foolish and incoherent.

Now, Paul says the following:

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge....For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. (Colossians 2:2-3, 1:19)

In Christ are "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Of course, this has to be true if Jesus is the omniscient God. Christ possesses all wisdom and knowledge, and he "has become for us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

No previous prophet could claim to have possessed "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" or to be the incarnation of God. As Hebrews 1:1-3 says:

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, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all

things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

God spoke through the prophets in the past, but now he had spoken through his Son, in whom are "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He is also the one who has created and even now sustains the universe. Therefore, the biblical Christ has exhaustive knowledge of all things.

If all wisdom and knowledge are in Christ, then unlike the prophets who went before him, he was the full and final revelation of God to mankind. Since he was the complete expression of God (Hebrews 1:3), there is nothing else that anyone after him may reveal that is not already in Christ. Both the prophets before Christ and the apostles after Christ only proclaimed him as the full revelation of God, and no biblical writer claimed to supersede him. Since Christ is the full expression or revelation of God, there is no one after him who can rightly claim to be his equal or superior, nor may anyone offer "revelations" that contradict, update, or supersede the Christian revelation in Scripture

It is strange that many of the prophets who claimed to supersede Christ would at the same time attempt to honor him as a true prophet of God. However, this person whom they acknowledge to be from God also said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus was the perfect and complete revelation of God because he was God himself. How then can there ever be a greater or more current and relevant messenger or revelation?

If one admits that Christianity is true, then he must also confess that all other religions and worldviews are false; otherwise, he would not be really admitting that Christianity is true, since exclusivity is integral to it. If he claims that Christianity is false, then he distances himself from the Christian worldview and assumes another one. This generates a collision of worldviews, giving the Christian an opportunity to totally annihilate the beliefs of his opponent in debate and to make him a public example.

One either believes that Christianity is true, or he believes that it is false. If he believes that Christianity is true, then all other religions and worldviews are false; if he believes that Christianity is false, then he must defeat it in the battlefield of rational argumentation. To claim that Christianity is only partially true or even mostly true is tantamount to saying that Christianity is false, since Christianity itself claims to be wholly true in every aspect and detail.

It is popular to say that there is some truth in every religion, that one should not affirm his own religion to the total exclusion of others, and that one should always respect another's religion. But this is an act of cowardly compromise. That even some professing Christians consider this a legitimate option reflects their feeble or non-existent commitment to Christ, the lack of proper biblical teaching, and the lack of church discipline.

If a religious worldview is a revelation from God, then no aspect of the system may be false or irrelevant. God does not reveal falsehood, and if he does, it would be impossible for one to distinguish the true from the false. If a given worldview consists of both true and false propositions, one would not be able to distinguish the true from the false on the basis of that worldview itself.

If one distinguishes between the true from the false in a given worldview, it necessarily implies that he is presupposing another worldview as his standard of truth, which he knows or assumes to be wholly correct, by which he is now evaluating the worldview in question. He must assume his standard of truth as wholly correct, since otherwise he would not be able to evaluate whether different aspects of another worldview is true or false. This being the case, he would not be learning anything from the worldview that is under scrutiny, since he has already adopted one that he assumes to be entirely true.

For example, one who tests a truth-claim with the "scientific method" presupposes a worldview in which such a method for testing truth-claims is assumed to be reliable. But if the worldview based on which he makes this assumption is not wholly true, then he cannot know whether the scientific method is reliable in the first place. Therefore, a worldview that is only partially true is also a worthless one; it logically collapses into complete epistemological skepticism so that no knowledge is possible at all.

The Christian claim is that all of the Bible is true, and if all wisdom and knowledge are in Christ, then anything that is true in other religions and worldviews have been stolen from Christianity. If the non-Christians then claim that such information comes from their own worldview, they have become plagiarists and hypocrites even from a human perspective. But it is much more serious from God's perspective:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them....For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. (Romans 1:18-19, 21-22)

Paul affirms that all human beings have an innate and inescapable knowledge of the Christian God, but the non-Christians refused to acknowledge him. They did not glorify or thank him as God and creator. Instead, they perverted their innate knowledge and tendencies, resulting in idolatry. Then they credited anything that is true in their system of thought to the idols that they worship. Romans 1:25 says, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator." This condemnation applies equally to the non-Christian scientists as it does to the Buddhists and Mormons.

Therefore, to say that non-Christian religions and worldviews possess some truth only serves to condemn them, and does nothing to support their credibility or usefulness at all. The recognition that false religions nevertheless have something true to say does not imply that we must respect them, but it only means that we have caught them "red-handed" in their crime of spiritual robbery against God. They have received from God, and yet they deny him.

We are not saying that God reveals himself in a limited way through non-Christian religions while he reveals himself most fully and truly through the Christian religion. Rather, we are saying that God does not reveal himself through any non-Christian religion or worldview at all. Each person is born with an innate knowledge of the Christian God, but in defiance against him, non-Christians suppress this knowledge and construct their own worldviews based on non-Christian premises. However, they cannot completely suppress all traces of Christian truth, and thus we see that all non-Christian religions and worldviews nevertheless borrow Christian principles that are impossible to justify on the basis of non-Christian premises. That is, the Christian principles in their religions and worldviews cannot be deduced from their non-Christian first principles. Therefore, any "truth" in non-Christian religions and worldviews is evidence of deceit and wickedness, and not evidence of genuine divine revelation.

They have set up their "golden calves" and loudly declare, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4)! However, God has said, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols" (Isaiah 42:8). Rather than giving the glory due to the God of the Christian Bible, they suppress their knowledge of this true God, and give glory to idols instead. Therefore, adherents to non-Christian religions and worldviews are "without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). An idol worshiper fails to give glory to whom glory is due, since he does not receive rain and other provisions from his idol, but from the Christian God. Although God has given him an innate knowledge concerning himself, the person suppresses the truth because of his wickedness (Romans 1:18), and chooses to honor an idol instead (Romans 1:21). Likewise, an atheist receives rain and other provisions from God, but he credits them to natural causes instead. For this reason, the wrath of God is poured out upon all non-Christians.

If Christ possesses all wisdom and knowledge, then the fact that any non-Christian can know $1 + 1 = 2$ means that Christ, who is "the true light that gives light to every man" (John 1:9), has given him this knowledge. This knowledge does not originate or reside in his non-Christian religion or worldview, but it is an integral part of the Christian system. If he does not give thanks to the Christian God for this knowledge, then he is committing spiritual and intellectual robbery in failing to give credit to the proper source of his knowledge.

On the other hand, Christians receive knowledge freely from the one they worship: "It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God"

(1 Corinthians 1:30). Since Christ has a monopoly on truth, any person who knows anything at all owes his knowledge to Christ, and a failure to worship him and give him thanks is a sin deserving the ultimate punishment.

Therefore, it follows that it is sinful for Christians to say that they can learn anything from non-Christian religions and worldviews. Suppose that a non-Christian religion has within it a piece of true information. From our premise that Christ is the possessor of all wisdom and knowledge, this piece of information must necessarily be a "Christian" truth that this other religion has stolen, and therefore it is first a part of the Christian revelation. Attempting to learn a Christian truth from a non-Christian source is irreverent and foolish. Only the biblical revelation sets forth truth without mixture or distortion.

To revisit an aforementioned issue, if a religious system is only partially true but not entirely true, it would be impossible to distinguish the true from the false on the basis of this religion itself. Christians who say that other religions contain some truths are able to recognize these truths for what they are precisely because they have already learned them from the Christian worldview, which they affirm to be entirely true; otherwise, there is no way to tell the true from the false.

Suppose a given system of thought includes the following propositions: (1) X is a man, and (2) X is an accountant. If in reality (1) is true but (2) is false, how will one know to affirm (1) and deny (2), unless he is already acquainted with X? Unless a given worldview A is true in its entirety, there is no way to tell which proposition is true without importing knowledge gained from outside of the system, such as a given worldview B, in which case the system in question (A) would be evaluated by the system from which one has obtained the said imported knowledge (B). But if one has already obtained this knowledge from another system of thought (B), how is he learning from this system in question (A)? He is judging it, not learning from it.

There is nothing to learn from a religion or worldview that is not wholly true. One can only learn from a system of thought if it is true in its entirety, and then one may use the knowledge acquired to evaluate another system that is not wholly true, but not to learn from it. To say that a given non-Christian religion or worldview possesses "some truth" is therefore to condemn it as unfit for belief, and not to praise or honor it at all.

There is nothing true that any non-Christian religion or worldview may teach that is not first part of the Christian system. All true and knowable information is already stated or implied in the Christian worldview; any true information not stated or implied by the biblical revelation is unknowable. To say otherwise would be to deny our basic premise that all wisdom and knowledge are in Christ, in which case we may question whether the one making the denial is a Christian in the first place.

Therefore, I conclude that there is nothing that Christians may learn from non-Christians that is not already included or implied in the Christian worldview, only that the Bible reveals these truths without impurity or mixture, and in a way that is comprehensive and coherent. For me to say that other religions have "some truth" is to insult them – I am

implying that their prophets are wicked thieves, certainly not worthy of anyone's trust and respect.

Paul says, "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 3:10). God intends for the church to glorify him by manifesting his wisdom in the context of the proclamation of an exclusive message. He certainly does not intend for the church to praise non-Christian religions and worldviews for the wisdom and knowledge that they have stolen from us, and still less does he intend for the church to affirm the falsehoods in other religions and worldviews as truths. Non-Christian religions and worldviews may contain several true propositions – always enough of them to render them culpable, but never enough to make salvation possible.

The same criticisms against non-Christian religions apply to worldviews that claim to be non-religious. For example, Christians can learn nothing from the atheistic worldview unless atheism is true in its entirety. The atheist can know nothing at all if not for Christ the *logos*, who facilitates knowledge and communication among men. There is nothing in the non-Christian worldview that can offer any truth to the Christian that is not already in the Christian worldview.

For example, a Christian may obtain a drink of water from an atheist, who has it to offer through collecting rain. But the rain does not come from, and cannot ultimately be explained by, anything inherent in the atheist's worldview; rather, rain comes from the Christian God. The difference is that the Christian gives thanks to God for the water, but the atheist does not, and in failing to acknowledge the true God who is the ultimate source of rain, the atheist sins and commits his soul to everlasting damnation.

Likewise, a Christian student may learn that $1 + 1 = 2$ from an atheist tutor, but this piece of information belongs to Christ, who has all wisdom and knowledge. The atheist is simply teaching the Christian something that is inherent in the Christian worldview, which he has learned from Christ the *logos* without giving due thanks to God. On the other hand, the Christian acknowledges that all knowledge belongs to Christ, and gives thanks to God for this piece of information.

To speak in terms of propositions, all true propositions are in fact Christian propositions – they are the property of Christ; therefore, they are much more appropriately and accurately expressed within the context of the Christian worldview. Thus, to say that Christians may in fact learn true knowledge from non-Christians, such as $1 + 1 = 2$, does not mean that it is desirable to do so, since some degree of distortion and limitation inevitably results because of the non-Christian presuppositions of the one who teaches.

Even knowledge that is seemingly non-religious in nature is best expressed and taught within an explicitly Christian context. For example, if God is the ruler and planner of history, then a textbook on Western civilizations that fails to mention divine providence is not a good history text at all, since it neglects the very factor that determines all historical events and progress. If what the Christian Scripture says about creation is true,

then "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) is a superior explanation to the existence of the universe than any sophisticated system of cosmology that fails to acknowledge him as the first and sustaining cause of all that exists (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). Similar things can be said about the fields of economics, literature, music, and even sports.

One who insists on thinking independently from the biblical propositions revealed by God must refute the worldview challenge presented by the Christian system. If all things have been created and are now sustained by the divine *logos*, Jesus Christ, then thinking itself is without ultimate justification without first presupposing the Christian worldview. Reasoning cannot even be intelligible without the existence of an eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and rational mind, from whom we who are made in the image of God and thus patterned after his mind have received the laws of logic and grammar. The non-Christian must show on the basis of his worldview, without borrowing Christian presuppositions, that the laws of logic are not arbitrary rules or mere conventions; otherwise, any argument that he makes may be dismissed as based on arbitrary rules or mere conventions. Failing to overcome this obstacle, the non-Christian cannot even debate the Christian on any topic before presupposing the entire Christian worldview.

Unbelievers often accuse the exclusivity of Christians as indicating a lack of love toward people. However, the Bible teaches that true love "does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). Christians are under no obligation to allow non-Christians to define the meaning of divine love for us.

The intellectual coward who cannot refute the biblical worldview says that Christians are narrow-minded, hateful, and bigoted. But we reject all non-Christian religions and worldviews because they are false. An "openness" that would accept the lie just as quickly as it assents to the truth betrays a stupid, depraved, and twisted mind, not a sign of intellectual acuity or moral progress. Christians who boldly condemn all non-Christian religions and worldviews as false do so not because they are bigoted, but because they would believe the truth rather than the lie, and because they are not stupid.

Therefore, let us submit to the following apostolic declarations:

If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him. Come, O Lord! (1 Corinthians 16:22)

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:8-9)

So be it. Let anyone be eternally condemned who advocates a religion or worldview that disagrees with biblical Christianity.

We must insist that only Christianity is true and that all non-Christian religions and worldviews are false, because this belief is an integral and necessary part of biblical Christianity, and those who claim to be Christians do not have the option to reject it. As Christians, we should glory in the exclusive nature of our faith instead of being ashamed of it. The matter is not whether one finds the claim emotionally satisfying, although we should, but whether it is objectively true that Christ, and therefore Christianity, is the sole possessor of truth, and that any so-called truths in other religions and worldviews are nothing more than stolen goods and evidence of their guilt.

The Bible itself claims an exclusive status, and no name-calling against the Christian, saying that he is advocating hate and bigotry, can change the truth of this claim. Anyone who rejects the Christian's claim to exclusivity must be ready to confront the Christian worldview with his own non-Christian worldview. Those professing Christians who oppose the total exclusivity and superiority of Christianity should recognize that they have rejected biblical infallibility, that they have repudiated the authority of Christ, the prophets, and the apostles, and thus they have no biblical grounds from which to call themselves Christians.

If Christianity dares to declare itself as having a monopoly on truth and expect others to comply, then it is only right that it should demonstrate its superiority when assaulted by other worldviews. However, it would be intellectually dishonest and morally despicable for the non-Christian to remain resistant to the Christian worldview, including its claim to exclusivity, after the Christian has triumphed in argumentation.

In connection to this, the church in general is at fault for not providing believers with better training in apologetics, so that many of them have succumbed to the cowardly appeal of the unbelievers to practice "tolerance," and thus have ceased to confront the false religions and worldviews embraced by them. Although Christians should be courteous toward unbelievers on a social level, those who are sympathetic to non-Christians on a theological or ideological level commit treason against Christ and his kingdom.

Colossians 2:9-10 says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority." If "all the fullness of Deity" is in Jesus Christ, no subsequent prophet can be greater than him, because there is nothing left to be revealed by another prophet that is not already in Christ, and those who claim to do so must be false prophets. Christ is "the head over every power and authority," and no one who comes after him may supersede him. If we "have been given fullness in Christ," who in turn has "all the fullness of the Deity," then there is nothing to learn from non-Christian religions and worldviews. If Christ is not merely a messenger or manifestation of God, but God himself, no prophet may alter, update, contradict, or add to the Christian revelation. Those who do are impostors and liars.

One may think that this type of language is surely too harsh and unkind; however, the Bible speaks of unbelievers as brutes, vipers, dogs, pigs, fools, hypocrites, whitewashed

tombs, and sons of the devil. We do not use harsh words out of bitterness, anger, or discourtesy, but as an attempt to give adequate descriptions of the stupidity and depravity of unbelief. In addition, we do not assert that non-Christians must remain as they are. Those of us who are saved "also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). However, "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" (v. 4-5). We do not gloat and triumph over the failures of non-Christians because of some superior qualities inherent in ourselves, but "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). And even now, we can do nothing apart from Christ (John 15:5).

Christians who have professed faith in Christ should understand to whom and to what they have committed themselves. Those who call themselves Christians who at the same time experience great difficulty with the biblical claims to exclusivity should examine themselves to see if they are genuine Christians (2 Corinthians 13:5), or whether they had greatly misunderstood the gospel message, and therefore experienced false conversions. Many people have accepted a diluted and distorted version of Christianity who at the same time would immediately reject an accurate presentation of biblical Christianity.

If they understand the true nature of Christianity as an exclusive religion and worldview, but continue to deny the supremacy and exclusive authority of Christ, thus repudiating the Christian faith, then by what definition are they genuine Christians? In what sense can a person be a Christian who declares that Christ may be only one option among many, and that his own claims to exclusive authority and truth are mistaken (Matthew 28:18; John 14:6)? In what sense can a person be a Christian who knowingly contradicts the apostles Peter and Paul (Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5)? This person falsely calls his faith "Christianity" since it defies biblical statements on a most important topic.

We must confront the indecisive professing Christians within the church, so that they must choose once for all whom they will serve (Joshua 24:15), and cease being double-minded or "between two opinions" (1 Kings 18:21). If Christianity is true, then all non-Christian religions and worldviews are false; if any other religion or worldview is true, then Christianity cannot at the same time be true.

Many Christians readily condemn stealing, adultery, and murder, with their stance seemingly immovable and not subject to compromise. However, they would at the same time encourage a type of non-confrontational dialogue with non-Christian religions and worldviews that betrays an attitude of viewing idolatry as not being as wicked as the sins. This reveals that their ethical standard is in the first place more humanistic than biblical, more man-centered than God-centered. They are horrified by violent crimes, but regard atheism and idolatry with a humanistic kindness and empathy.

However, false worship is a much greater sin than murder or rape. Jesus says that "the *first* and *greatest* commandment" is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37-38), while loving our fellow

human beings is designated as the second commandment (v. 39). Therefore, it is against the biblical standard of ethics to bemoan crimes against humanity more than sins against the only true God.

My concern is whether Christians consider atheism and idolatry to be the most serious of sins, or whether they may ignore the first four of the Ten Commandments while obeying the rest. I am convinced that the nonchalant and accommodating attitude of many Christians toward the sins of atheism and idolatry fails to reflect the Scripture's extreme denunciation against it. And to the extent that our thoughts disagree with God's thoughts, we sin against him by making him out to be a liar.

We must call upon Christians to make up their minds, that if they profess Jesus Christ as Lord, they must permanently give up their idolatrous and syncretistic mindset, and to maintain that the knowledge of salvation is found in the Scripture alone, that God's redemptive work is appropriated through Christ alone, and that it is applied to the individual by faith alone.

One who rejects the notion that a religion or worldview may be exclusively true is already practicing exclusivity in saying that it is exclusively true that no religion may make exclusive claims. All exclusive religions are to be excluded from acceptance. The appeal to tolerance or to be inclusive in our theology is often an excuse to avoid dealing with the numerous and irreconcilable contradictions between worldviews. The non-Christian should stop being an intellectual coward, face reality, and admit that because of these contradictory claims, not every worldview can be true.

What gives unbelievers the right to be intolerant of our exclusive claims in the first place? If they are truly tolerant, why do they not endure our attacks without fighting back? But they do fight back, and vehemently attack Christianity, but they do not attack the easy targets such as Islam and Buddhism nearly as often, if at all. However, these other religions also make strong exclusive claims. Is it just a case of ignorance in the study of religions, or is it a case of selective prejudice amounting to a global satanic conspiracy against the true faith?

Why do unbelievers focus their efforts on attacking Christianity? A number of things may go on in their twisted and depraved minds, but there are two obvious possibilities. First, only the Christian worldview poses a threat to them from the intellectual point of view. Second, in reality there are only two groups of people in the world – Christians and non-Christians (Genesis 3:15). Jesus says, "He who is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30). From God's viewpoint, all non-Christians are on the same side, whether they are atheists, Buddhists, or Mormons. It is ultimately a case of the only truth against a variety of falsehoods, and not a number of worthy worldviews competing for dominance.

There are those who say that intellectual and ideological intolerance results from ignorance; however, these individuals themselves reject certain propositions based on what they claim to be knowledge, not ignorance. For example, they reject the idea that the earth is flat because of the knowledge that they claim to have. Therefore, intellectual

and ideological intolerance is often a claim to knowledge. We may argue about whether this alleged knowledge is true, but the very act of debate implies that each one considers the others to be wrong, and that each is willing to expose the errors of the others. On the other hand, tolerance is a mark of ignorance – one who does not know what is true or false has no basis from which to reject any idea or belief.

We should never tolerate falsehood, but we should expose and destroy it. Nevertheless, we do not do this through physical violence, but by unrestrained intellectual ruthlessness in rational dialogue and argumentation. As Paul says:

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

Honesty and courage demand that we promote the clash of worldviews in private and public debate, and decide beforehand that those who cannot withstand intense scrutiny should be abandoned as false. Christianity will be the only one left standing when the dust settles.

6. SALVATION

We will now turn to study in what way and in what order the benefits of redemption are applied to the elect. Some of these benefits occur or begin simultaneously in the new Christian when he believes in Christ, so that the order of application may not always be *chronologically* distinguishable, but the fact that some benefits are the preconditions of others implies that there is a *logical* order for the application of redemption.

It is possible to derive an outline of the order of the application of redemption from Romans 8:29-30, although we must also consider a number of other biblical passages to obtain the full list of items and their positions on the list:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

This chapter will present the application of the benefits of redemption in the following order: election, calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, and preservation.

ELECTED

The biblical doctrine of ELECTION teaches that God has chosen a definite number of individuals to obtain salvation through faith in Christ. The exact identities of these people have been determined and are unchangeable. God has chosen these individuals without any consideration of their decisions, actions, and other conditions in them, but the basis of his choice was his will alone. He chose these people for salvation just because he wanted to choose them, and not because he foresaw anything that they will decide or perform.

Although I will more fully discuss the doctrine of election and respond to several objections in this section, I have already been explaining and defending the doctrine throughout this book, and all the arguments in support of absolute sovereignty and divine election that had appeared in the previous chapters also apply to this section. Remembering this will reduce the need for repetition.

Our first biblical passage comes from Romans 9. Although national Israel was supposedly God's chosen nation, most of its people had rejected Christ, and thus were kept from salvation. Does this mean that God's promise toward Israel had failed? Paul resolves this question in his letter to the Romans:

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." (Romans 9:6-9)

Although "Israel" was God's chosen nation, not everyone born a natural Israelite was a genuine Israelite. God never made the promise of salvation to national Israel, but only to the true descendants of Abraham, which constitutes the spiritual Israel. When his opponents claimed to be the descendants of Abraham, Jesus replied, "If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things" (John 8:38-40). Although these people were Abraham's natural descendants, Jesus said that they were not his real children, but that their father was the devil (v. 44).

On the other hand, Paul writes, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). Those who have the faith of Abraham are the genuine children of Abraham (Romans 4:16). The promise of God was made to the spiritual descendants of Abraham, not to the natural descendants. Of course, the natural descendants of Abraham who believe in Christ are also his spiritual descendants, and thus are also heirs to the promise, but they are heirs only on account of their spiritual heritage and not their natural heritage.

Paul then cites the example of Jacob and Esau:

Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Romans 9:10-13)

Although both Jacob and Esau were natural descendants of Isaac, God treated them differently by favoring the younger over the elder. This decision was not based on "anything good or bad" that they had done, but it was so that "God's purpose in election might stand." The choice was unconditional, meaning that it was "not by works but by him who calls." Jacob was favored because of the sovereign will of God, not because of something that he had done or would do; God's choice was completely independent of any condition in Jacob. As verse 15 says, "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" Verse 16

expresses the necessary conclusion: "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Paul says that God saved us "because of *his own* purpose and grace," not because of any condition that he saw in us, and he gave us this saving grace "before the beginning of time" (2 Timothy 1:9). "He predestined us," Paul writes, "in accordance with *his pleasure and will*" (Ephesians 1:5), not because of what he knew we would decide or perform. We are called "according to *his purpose*" (Romans 8:28). To the Thessalonians, Paul writes, "He has chosen you" (1 Thessalonians 1:4), and not, "You have chosen him." He repeats this in his next letter to them and says, "God chose you to be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:13), and not, "You chose yourselves to be saved." Election does not depend on man's decisions or actions, but on the mercy of God that is dispensed by his sovereign will alone.

Jesus says the following in John 6:37, 44:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Verse 37 says that everyone that the Father gives to Jesus will come to Jesus, and verse 44 excludes everyone else from coming to Jesus. That is, everyone will be saved whom the Father gives to Jesus (v. 37), and no one will be saved whom the Father does not give to Jesus (v. 44). Since other biblical passages indicate that not everyone will be saved, it necessarily follows that the Father does not give every person to Jesus to be saved.

The word translated "draws" in verse 44 also means "drags," "pulls," or even "compels," so that it may read, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me *drags* him, *pulls* him, and *compels* him." For example, the word is translated as "dragged" and "dragging" in the NIV in the following verses:

When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and *dragged* them into the marketplace to face the authorities. (Acts 16:19)

The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they *dragged* him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. (Acts 21:30)

But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are *dragging* you into court? (James 2:6)

Keeping in mind the total depravity of man (Romans 3:10-12, 23), that he is spiritually dead and cannot respond to or even request any assistance, Jesus is saying that no one can have faith in him unless chosen and compelled by the Father. Since faith in Christ is the only way to salvation (Acts 4:12), and since it is the Father alone and not the human individuals themselves who chooses those who would come to Christ, it follows that it is the Father who chooses who would receive salvation, and not the human individuals themselves.¹

Jesus repeats this teaching in John 6:63-66:

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that *no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.*" From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

No one can come to Jesus unless enabled by the Father; that is, no one has the ability to accept Jesus unless the Father gives it to him. This same passage shows that the Father does not give this ability to everyone, since many of them did not believe and "many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."²

Jesus says to his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16; also v. 19). He says, "No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom *the Son chooses* to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). In Matthew 22:14, he says, "For many are invited, but *few are chosen,*" and not, "For many are invited, but few accept the invitation." That is, many people may hear the preaching of the gospel, but only those "appointed for eternal life" (Acts 13:48) can and will believe. The elect are those "whom [God] has chosen" (Mark 13:20). Believers have been "chosen *by grace*" (Romans 11:5), and they are those who "*by grace* had believed" (Acts 18:27). Thus one does not choose himself for salvation by accepting Christ, but one receives salvation by accepting Christ because God has chosen him first. Faith is not the cause of election, but election is the cause of faith. We believe in Christ because God first chose us to be saved and then caused us to believe in Christ. We are saved because God chose us, not because we chose him.

¹ "And who, in this world of death and sin, I do not say merely will, but can, will the good? Is it not forever true that grapes are not gathered from thorns, nor figs from thistles; that it is only the good tree which brings forth good fruit while the evil tree brings forth always and everywhere only evil fruit?...It is useless to talk of salvation being for 'whosoever will' in a world of universal 'won't'"; Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*; Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000 (original: 1915); p. 43.

² Jesus contradicts the common assumption that responsibility presupposes ability – that is, the assumption that if one is unable to accept the gospel, then he should not be blamed for rejecting it. However, Jesus says that all human beings are unable to accept the gospel unless enabled by God, but all who reject the gospel will still be punished for their unbelief. Thus responsibility does not presuppose ability. We will discuss this further in what follows.

The following lists a number of biblical passages relevant to the doctrine of election, including fuller quotations of those passages that are only partially cited above. Some of these passages are also relevant to the other topics that we will discuss later in this chapter:

Blessed are those *you choose* and bring near to live in your courts!
We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple. (Psalm 65:4)

All things have been committed to me by my Father. 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. (Matthew 11:27)

For many are invited, but *few are chosen*. (Matthew 22:14)

If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of *the elect, whom he has chosen*, he has shortened them. (Mark 13:20)

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. (John 15:16)

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but *I have chosen you* out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (John 15:19)

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were *appointed for eternal life* believed. (Acts 13:48)

When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who *by grace had believed*. (Acts 18:27)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been *called according to his purpose*. (Romans 8:28)

And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those *who did not seek me*; I revealed myself to those *who did not ask for me*." (Romans 10:20)

And what was God's answer to him? "*I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.*" So too, at the present time there is a *remnant chosen by grace*. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but *the elect did*. The *others were hardened*, as it is written: "*God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.*" (Romans 11:4-8)

For *he chose us* in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love *he predestined us* to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, *in accordance with his pleasure and will* – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:4-6)

In him we were also *chosen*, having been *predestined* according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of *his will*, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which *God prepared in advance* for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

For it has been *granted to you* on behalf of Christ not only *to believe* on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. (Philippians 1:29-30)³

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is *God who works* in you *to will* and *to act* according to *his good purpose*. (Philippians 2:12-13)⁴

For we know, brothers loved by God, that *he has chosen you*, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

³ No one can decide to believe the gospel against his sinful disposition, but faith must be sovereignly granted by God as a gift (Ephesians 2:8), and he does not give faith to all human beings.

⁴ God continues to direct both our decisions and actions according to his own purpose even after we have become Christians. We are conscious of our spiritual efforts, but such efforts are still only products of the sovereign power of God.

For *God* did not *appoint us* to suffer wrath but *to receive salvation* through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:9)⁵

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning *God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work* of the Spirit and *through belief* in the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:13)⁶

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but *because of his own purpose and grace*. This grace was *given us* in Christ Jesus *before the beginning of time*, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:8-10)

But you are a *chosen people*, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)⁷

The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth *whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world* will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. (Revelation 17:8)⁸

⁵ God appointed the reprobates "to suffer wrath," but he appointed the elect "to receive salvation."

⁶ Faith is a necessary condition for justification, but faith is not the reason or cause for election, but rather the product of election. Faith in Christ is the means by which God saves those whom he has chosen.

⁷ Although election is not corporate, the group of chosen individuals naturally forms a "chosen people."

⁸ In some instances, the "book of life" refers to natural life (Psalm 69:28; Exodus 32:32; Daniel 12:1), but the term is used of eternal life in later Judaism and in the New Testament (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5). Thus in some passages where it appears that God may blot out the names of some from his book, it is referring to natural life, while in the New Testament, the emphasis is more on eternal life, and the names written in the book of eternal life will not be blotted out. Revelation 3:5 says that God will not blot out the names of those who overcome, and some people misunderstand this to imply that one may indeed be blotted out after his name has been written in the book. But 1 John 1:4 promises us that "Everyone born of God overcomes the world." Since all true believers will overcome, and those who overcome will never be blotted out, it follows that true believers will never be blotted out. Therefore, instead of allowing the possibility for true believers to lose their salvation, Revelation 3:5 makes it impossible. Now, Revelation 17:8 says that the names of all individuals were either written in or excluded from the book of life "from the creation of the world," so that the identities of the elect and the reprobates have been unchangeably determined. Also, since God elects or rejects individuals by name, election is not corporate in nature. See *New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition*; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996; p. 144-145.

They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his *called, chosen* and *faithful* followers. (Revelation 17:14)

The Bible does not paint the picture of humanity as a group of people drowning in the sea of sin, and as many as would cooperate with Christ would be rescued. Instead, it paints a picture in which all human beings are dead in the water (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 3:10), and have sunken all the way to the bottom (Jeremiah 17:9). Since they are dead, they are unable to cooperate with any assistance, or even request it. In fact, they would choose not to be rescued if left by themselves (Romans 8:7; Colossians 1:21). Against such a situation, the Father has chosen some to be saved by Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 1:4-5) by dragging them out of the water (John 6:44, 65), purely by his own initiative (Romans 9:15). Having done so, he raises them from the dead into new life in Christ (Luke 15:24; Romans 6:13).

The biblical doctrine of election teaches that although all human beings deserve endless torment in hell because of their sins, God has chosen to show mercy toward some of them. God chose them before the creation of the universe and the fall of man, and he chose them without consideration of any condition in them, whether good or bad. Having chosen some for salvation, God sent Christ to die as full payment for their sins, so that God may credit the righteousness merited by Christ to them when they come to Christ. On the other hand, those who are not chosen for salvation are appointed for damnation, and they will receive the appropriate punishment for their sins, which is endless torment in hell.

We will now respond to several objections. This will also give us the opportunity to clarify and expand on certain aspects of this doctrine.

Many of those who refuse to accept the biblical view of election assert that God has indeed chosen some for salvation, but the basis for his choice was his FOREKNOWLEDGE. That is, God knew beforehand which individuals would freely accept Christ, and on this basis he has chosen them. This unbiblical view destroys the meaning of election, since it means that God does not choose people for salvation at all, but that he simply accepts the choices of those who would choose themselves for salvation.

When the word "foreknowledge" is used in the above manner, it is referring to God's cognitive awareness of future facts, such as the decisions and actions of individuals. Thus proponents of this view defines divine foreknowledge as prescience. Furthermore, it is implied that this knowledge is passive, so that it is not God who causes the future events that he knows, but he passively grasp what his creatures will cause to occur. In what follows, I will be showing that defining "foreknowledge" as passive prescience generates insuperable problems, and that the term means something different in the Bible.

First, we have already shown that every human being is in himself both unable and unwilling to come to Christ for salvation; a person can and will come to Christ only if the Father enables and compels him to do so (John 6:44, 65). We have also established that the Father does not enable and compel every human being to come to Christ. This means that a person comes to Christ only because the Father causes him to come to Christ.

Since this is true, then to say that election is based on God's prescience of man's future decisions is only to say that God knows whom he himself will cause to accept Christ, and such prescience would not be passive. If God elects a person because he knows that this person will accept Christ, but if this person will accept Christ only because God will cause him to do so, then to say that God knows this person will accept Christ is the same as saying that God knows that he will cause this person to accept Christ. God's election of this person is then still based on his own sovereign decision to choose this person for salvation, and not based on a passive knowledge that this person will accept Christ without God causing him to do so.

This is what the Bible teaches, but then it means that divine prescience is not a passive knowledge of what a person will decide or perform, but that it is a knowledge of what God will cause him to decide or perform. Divine prescience is a form of God's self-knowledge – a knowledge of his own plans, and a knowledge of what he will actualize in the future. Therefore, to say that election is based on prescience does not challenge our position at all, since God's knowledge of the future is never passive, but it is he himself who causes everything that he knows will happen in the future (Isaiah 46:10).

Second, the Bible states that divine election is not based on man's decisions or actions, that God does not choose someone for salvation because of what this person will decide or perform.

For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So it *depends not* on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy....So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses. (Romans 9:15-16, 18; NRSV)

Divine election is not based on a passive prescience, and divine prescience is not passive in the first place. God chooses a person because he wants to choose that person, and he knows who will believe the gospel because he knows whom he will cause to believe the gospel.

Third, defining God's foreknowledge as passive prescience in fact fails to make sense of the biblical passages saying that divine election is based on foreknowledge:

For those God *foreknew* he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called,

he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been *chosen according to the foreknowledge* of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1 Peter 1:1-2)

Our opponents would interpret these two passages as saying that divine election is based on foreknowledge in the sense of passive prescience; that is, God has chosen those whom he passively knew would accept Christ.

Now, the structure of Romans 8:29-30 necessarily implies that all the individuals included in one phase of the order of salvation would also enter into all the subsequent phases, and that all the individuals in any phase of the order of salvation have also been included in all the previous phases. Thus all those foreknown are also predestined; all those predestined are also called; all those called are also justified; and all those justified are also glorified.

Michael Magill translates the passage as follows:

Because *whom* He foreknew, [*these*] He also predestined...
And *whom* He predestined, *these* He also called
And *whom* He called, *these* He also declared-righteous
And *whom* He declared righteous, *these* He also glorified⁹

Therefore, whatever foreknowledge means, everyone who is foreknown by God is also justified by God. However, the passage does not say that it is the people's *faith* or *choices* that are foreknown by God, but that it is the *people* that are foreknown. Our opponents assume that foreknowledge means prescience in this passage. But since it is the *people* that are foreknown, since God's knowledge of the future is exhaustive, and since everyone foreknown is also justified, then it necessarily follows that if one defines foreknowledge as prescience in this passage, one must also understand it to teach universal salvation.

That is, if foreknowledge here refers to God's knowledge of future facts (especially a passive prescience), if foreknowledge is applied to people in this passage and not to their faith or choices, if God knows about all human beings, and if all who are foreknown are justified, then all human beings are justified. But Scripture consistently teaches that not everyone is saved or justified; therefore, foreknowledge as related to divine election, and when used in this passage in particular, cannot mean prescience (especially a passive prescience). Foreknowledge must mean something else.

⁹ Michael Magill, *New Testament Transline*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002; p. 540.

We will establish that, in a salvific context, the "knowledge" of God refers to his sovereign choice and purposive affection for persons and not to his passive awareness of facts. For example, Matthew 7:23 says, "Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never *knew* you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" Since Jesus as God is omniscient, "I never knew you" cannot mean that he has never been aware of these people's existence, thoughts, and actions. In fact, he knows that they are "evildoers." Therefore, the denial of "knowledge" here is a denial of a salvific relationship, and not a passive awareness of facts. Accordingly, "*foreknowledge*" would refer to a salvific relationship established in the mind of God before the existence of the chosen individuals; that is, foreknowledge means foreordination.

Many biblical passages employ the concept of foreknowledge in this sense. For example, God says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb *I knew you*, before you were born *I set you apart; I appointed you* as a prophet to the nations." Of course God would know a person whom he himself intends to create; that is, God knows his own plans. The main sense here is that before Jeremiah was conceived, God has chosen him – not that God was pleased with what he passively knew about Jeremiah, but that God has designed and made him.

God's foreknowledge as election and foreordination is made more evident by the parallelism of the lines in this verse. When one line or expression parallels another line or expression in a verse, one part expands on or clarifies the meaning of the other part. For example, "For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters" (Psalm 24:2) does not necessarily mean that in addition to having "founded it upon the seas," he also "established it upon the waters." Rather, "established it upon the waters" carries a similar meaning as "founded it upon the seas," and helps to clarify its meaning. Another example comes from the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus says, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13). It is not that we are to ask God to "deliver us from the evil one" in addition to "lead us not into temptation," but "deliver us from the evil one" is what is meant by "lead us not into temptation."

With this in mind, the parallelism in God's call to Jeremiah helps to clarify the meaning of "I knew you." Again, Jeremiah 1:5 says, "Before I formed you in the womb *I knew you*, before you were born *I set you apart; I appointed you* as a prophet to the nations." Or, we may translate the verse as follows:

I knew you before I formed you in the womb,
I consecrated you before you were born;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.

The words "I knew you" correspond to "I consecrated you" and "I appointed you," and the three expressions carry similar meanings. For God to know Jeremiah in the sense intended here is to consecrate and appoint him for God's own purpose.

S. M. Baugh also uses this passage to illustrate the meaning of divine foreknowledge, and writes as follows:

Another remarkable example of divine foreknowledge is expressed in Jeremiah 1:5, where God says to Jeremiah:

I knew you before I formed you in the womb,
I consecrated you before you emerged from the womb;
I have given you as a prophet to the nations.

The first two lines are closely parallel in the number of syllables and word order...

But how can God have known Jeremiah before he was even conceived? Because he personally fashioned his prophet, just as he had fashioned Adam from the dust (Gen. 2:7), and just as he fashions all people (Ps. 139:13-16; Isa. 44:24). God foreknew not only the possibility of Jeremiah's existence – he knows all possibilities indeed – but God foreknew Jeremiah by name before he was conceived, because he knew how he would shape and mold his existence.¹⁰

Huey writes, "Here it involves a *choosing* relationship (Gen 18:19; Deut 34:10). The Lord was thinking about Jeremiah before he was born. At that time God had already designated Jeremiah to be a prophet."¹¹

The point is that God's foreknowledge refers to a personal relationship originated by his sovereign decision, and not by a passive awareness of future persons and events. Since nothing occurs apart from his active decree (Matthew 10:29), his knowledge of the future is rooted in his own sovereign will. The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* says, "God's foreknowledge stands related to his will and power. What he knows, he does not know merely as information. He is no mere spectator. What he foreknows he ordains. He wills it."¹²

In the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, J. M. Gundry-Volf writes:

Rather than referring to speculative or neutral knowledge (i.e., knowledge of who will believe), the Pauline notion of divine foreknowledge is understood by many interpreters as a knowing in the Semitic sense of acknowledging, inclining toward someone, knowledge which expresses a movement of the will reaching out to personal relationship with someone. This kind of knowing is

¹⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner & Bruce A. Ware, ed., *Still Sovereign*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000; p. 186.

¹¹ F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah & Lamentations* (The New American Commentary); Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1993; p. 50.

¹² *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1984; "Foreknowledge," p. 420.

illustrated by the meaning of the Hebrew *yada*, "to know," in texts such as Amos 3:2; Hosea 13:5; and Jeremiah 1:5....In Paul's use of *proginosko* the aspect of pretemporality is added to the Hebrew sense of "know" as "have regard for" or "set favor on." The result is a verb which refers to God's eternal loving election.¹³

The article on foreknowledge in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* helps to reinforce several points that we have discussed:

Arminian theology, in all its variant forms, contends that God's foreknowledge is simply a prescient knowledge, a knowing in advance whether a given person will believe in Christ or reject him. God's election, therefore, is said to be simply God's choice unto salvation of those whom He knows in advance will choose to believe in Christ. God foresees the contingent free action of faith and, foreseeing who will believe in Christ, elects those because they do. But this is destructive of the biblical view of election. In biblical thought election means that God elects people, not that people elect God. In Scripture it is God who in Christ decides for us – not we who, by making a decision for Christ, decide for God.

Reformation theology has contended that the divine foreknowledge contains the ingredient of divine determination. The Reformers claimed that God indeed foreknows who will believe, because believing in Christ is not a human achievement, but a divine gift imparted to men by God's grace and Spirit. Thus God's foreknowledge is not merely prescience, but a knowledge that itself determines the event. That is, in Reformation thought what God foreknows He foreordains....

That God's foreknowledge contains the idea of divine determination does not rest merely on a few biblical texts but reflects a truth about God that comes to expression in a variety of biblical concepts descriptive of the unique and mysterious character of God's actions. God's foreknowledge is itself a form of determination which accounts for the reality of that which is divinely foreknown....¹⁴

Thus it is a mistake to define foreknowledge as passive prescience because the Bible means something else by the term.

¹³ *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993; "Foreknowledge, Divine," p. 310-311.

¹⁴ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982; "Foreknowledge," p. 336-337.

Now that we have clarified the meaning of foreknowledge, we must apply the correct definition to the passage in dispute, which reads as follows:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

Concerning this passage, Baugh writes:

The classic Arminian interpretation of Romans 8:29, that God's foreknowledge of faith is in view, is clearly reading one's theology into the text. Paul does not say: "whose faith he foreknew," but "whom he foreknew." He foreknew us....But in Romans 8:29, predestination is not dependent on faith; rather, God predestines us on the basis of his gracious commitment to us before the world was....

Perhaps another rendering better expresses the concept behind Romans 8:29: "Those to whom he was previously devoted...." This again, is not to say that God's foreknowledge is devoid of intellectual cognition; to have a personal relation with someone, such as a marriage relation, includes knowledge about that person....God has foreknown us because he fashioned each of us personally and intimately according to his plan....

That Paul refers to this concept of a committed relationship with the phrase *whom he foreknew* in Romans 8:29 is confirmed by the context....

Further confirmation of "foreknowledge" in Romans 8:29 as referring to a previous commitment is found in a nearby passage, Romans 11:1-2, where *proginosko* can have only this meaning: "God has not rejected his people, has he? No way! For I also am an Israelite....God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." As in Romans 8:29, the objects of foreknowledge are people themselves rather than historical events or a particular person's faith....

The Arminian notion of "foreseen faith" is impossible as an interpretation of God's foreknowledge in Romans 11:1-2, and, consequently, in the earlier passage, Romans 8:29, as well. The latter explains that God initiated a committed relationship from eternity with certain individuals whom he predestined for grace.¹⁵

¹⁵ *Still Sovereign*, p. 194-195.

F. F. Bruce agrees, saying that, "God's foreknowledge here connotes that electing grace which is frequently implied by the verb 'to know' in the Old Testament. When God takes knowledge of people in this special way, he sets his choice on them."¹⁶

Douglas Moo also argues that foreknowledge means foreordination when used in Romans 8:29:

In [Arminianism] the human response of faith is made the object of God's "foreknowledge"; and this foreknowledge, in turn, is the basis for predestination: for "whom he foreknew, he predestined." But I consider it unlikely that this is the correct interpretation. (1) The NT usage of the verb and its cognate noun does not conform to the general pattern of usage....the three others besides the occurrence in this text, all of which have God as their subject, mean not "know before" – in the sense of intellectual knowledge, or cognition – but "enter into relationship with before" or "choose, or determine, before" (Rom. 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2). (2) That the verb here contains this peculiarly biblical sense of "know" is suggested by the fact that it has a simple personal object. Paul does not say that God knew anything *about* us but that he knew *us*, and this is reminiscent of the OT sense of "know." (3) Moreover, it is only *some* individuals...who are the objects of this activity; and this shows that an action applicable only to Christians must be denoted by the verb. If, then, the word means "know intimately," "have regard for," this must be a knowledge or love that is unique to believers and that leads to their being predestined. This being the case, the difference between "know or love beforehand" and "choose beforehand" virtually ceases to exist.¹⁷

Although foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 cannot mean passive prescience, John Murray contends that even if it does, it still does not challenge the doctrine of election:

For it is certainly true that God foresees faith; he foresees all that comes to pass. The question would then simply be: whence proceeds this faith which God foresees? And the only biblical answer is that the faith which God foresees is the faith he himself creates....The interest, therefore, is simply one of interpretation as it should be applied to this passage....On exegetical grounds we

¹⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries), Revised Edition; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985; p. 166.

¹⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament); Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996; p. 532-533.

shall have to reject the view that "foreknew" refers to the foresight of faith....¹⁸

As the *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* says, "In Romans 8:29 and 11:2, the apostle Paul's use of the word foreknew means 'to choose' or 'to set special affection on.' The electing love of God, not foresight of human action, is the basis of His predestination and salvation."¹⁹

Some people who disagree with this understanding of foreknowledge argue that, if foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 means foreordination, then it would render redundant the word "predestined," since the verse says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined." It seems that the two words are referring to separate concepts in the verse; therefore, they argue that we ought to adopt passive prescience as the definition of foreknowledge.

However, they have failed to read the verse carefully. If the word *foreknew* means *foreordained* in this verse, it would be a reference to God's work of election, that is, his choice of the specific individuals whom he would save. Then, the verse says that these whom God has elected, he has also *predestined*, not to repeat the concept of election, but that he has set forth a "destination" or purpose in advance for the elect – namely, God's will is for them "to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." Foreknowledge in this verse refers to God's election of individuals to salvation, and predestination reveals the specific purpose or end that God has designed for his elect.

In other words, God has not only chosen the elect to receive salvation from sin, but also to become like his Son, Jesus Christ. The verse is saying that the same people whom God has elected are also the people whom God has given the "destination" or purpose to become like Christ, and that he has made such a decision in advance, and thus he "predestined" them.

Accordingly, Gundry-Volf writes:

Paul distinguishes between divine foreknowledge and divine predestination in Romans 8:29: "those whom he foreknew, he also predestined." While foreknowledge denotes the exercise of God's will to establish a special relationship with those whom God graciously elect before all time, predestination expresses God's appointing of them to a specific goal before all time...In Romans 8:29 this goal is conformity with the image of the Son, a reference to the final salvation of the elect. Foreknowledge as divine choice is thus the basis of predestination to glorification with Christ. Foreknowledge does not have to be understood as foresight of faith in order to be distinguished from predestination.²⁰

¹⁸ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 1; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997; p. 316-317.

¹⁹ *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986; "Foreknowledge."

²⁰ *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, p. 311.

Based on the above observations and arguments, it is necessary to understand foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 as foreordination. Kenneth Wuest recognizes this, and translates verses 29 and 30 as follows:

Because, those whom He *foreordained* He also *marked out beforehand* as those who were to be conformed to the derived image of His Son, with the result that He is firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, those whom He thus marked out beforehand, these He also summoned. And those whom He summoned, these He also justified. Moreover, those whom He justified, these He also glorified.²¹

The word "foreordained" here corresponds to foreknowledge, and the phrase "marked out beforehand" corresponds to predestination. Similarly, these verses in the GNT are translated as follows:

Those whom God had *already chosen* he also *set apart* to become like his Son, so that the Son would be the first among many believers. And so those whom God set apart, he called; and those he called, he put right with himself, and he shared his glory with them.

We may further confirm this understanding of foreknowledge by examining Acts 2:23 and 4:28. The first verse says, "This man was handed over to you by God's *set purpose* and *foreknowledge*; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." This does not mean that God was passively aware of what men would do to Jesus, but it means that his suffering was in fact God's "set purpose," which is also the meaning of foreknowledge here. Acts 4:28 also refers to the death of Christ, but it says, "They did what your power and will had *decided beforehand* should happen." But we just saw that in 2:23 Peter credits the incident to God's "set purpose" and "foreknowledge." It is evident that these terms have equivalent meanings, so that God's foreknowledge refers to his "set purpose" or what he has "decided beforehand." In fact, the words of 4:28 gives us a good definition for God's foreknowledge – it is "what [his] power and will had decided beforehand should happen." As Martin Luther writes, "It is, then, fundamentally necessary and wholesome for Christians to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His own immutable, eternal, and infallible will."²²

Without further argument, we may conclude that foreknowledge in 1 Peter 1:2 also cannot refer to a passive prescience. The verse says that we are, "elect according to the

²¹ Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

²² Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 2000 (reprint of 1957 edition); p. 80.

foreknowledge of God the Father." Of course we are – the verse means that Christians have been chosen and foreordained for salvation by the sovereign will of God.

Many people make the observation that biblical election contradicts the "free will" of man, and since they insist that man has free will, they accordingly reject the doctrines of absolute sovereignty and divine election as presented in this book. Against this objection, we may simply answer that human beings do not have free will at all. Although many Christians assume that human beings possess free will, this is a pagan notion that can find no support from the Bible.²³

R. K. McGregor Wright defines "free will" as follows: "By the term *free will* I mean the belief that the human will has an inherent power to choose with equal ease between alternatives. This is commonly called 'the power of contrary choice' or 'the liberty of indifference....' Ultimately, the will is free from any necessary causation. In other words, it is autonomous from outside determination."²⁴ Free will assumes "the absence of any controlling power, even God and his grace, and therefore the equal ability in any situation to choose either of two incompatible courses of action."²⁵ Assuming such a definition, I contend that man does not have free will.

In the first place, it is impossible for finite beings to have free will. If we think of the exercise of the will as the movement of the mind toward a certain direction,²⁶ the question arises as to what moves the mind, and why it moves toward where it moves. Even if we assume that the mind can move itself, we are still left with the question of why it moves itself toward a given direction, that is, why it chooses one option instead of another. If one traces the movement and direction of the mind to factors external to the mind itself – factors that impress themselves upon the consciousness from the outside, and thus influencing or determining the decision – then how is this movement of the mind free? On the other hand, if one traces the cause to the person's innate propensities, then this movement of the mind is likewise not free, since such in-built inclinations have not been freely chosen (that is, without external influences) by the person in the first

²³ R. K. McGregor Wright traces the concept of free will to humanistic and anti-Christian systems of philosophy, and notes its historical infiltration into the church. Of course, the human obsession with autonomy was in fact first introduced to Adam and Eve by the devil himself (Genesis 3:1-7). Some translations of the Bible contain the term "freewill" in a number of verses, but these instances do not relate to our topic, since they only refer to "freewill offerings" as opposed to legislated and required offerings. "The point is a distinction in the Law, not a metaphysical statement about whether the faculty of choice is caused or not"; *No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism*; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996; p. 157. Likewise, Luther writes, "That is to say, man should realise that in regard to his money and possessions he has a right to use them, to do or to leave undone, according to his own 'free-will' – though that very 'free-will' is overruled by the free-will of God alone, according to His own pleasure. However, with regard to God, and in all that bears on salvation or damnation, he has no 'free-will', but is a captive, prisoner and bondsman..." He suggests that the "safest and most Christian thing to do" is to "drop this term altogether" when speaking of man. Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; p. 107.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43-44.

²⁵ Gordon H. Clark, *Predestination*; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987 (original: 1969); p. 113.

²⁶ The biblical view of divine sovereignty necessarily implies that God is the ultimate and immediate cause of all "motions" or events, whether physical or mental. Since human decisions are not self-caused or uncaused, but caused and determined by God, free will as defined here does not exist.

place, yet they determine the decisions that he makes. If a person's decisions are determined by a mixture of innate propensities and external influences, it remains that he does not have free will.

If the mind makes decisions based on factors, causes, and influences not chosen by the mind itself, then these decisions are not free. Although we may affirm that man has a will, so that the mind can indeed move toward different options, the ability and reason for such movement is never determined by the mind itself, but by something other than the mind itself. Since this is true for all finite beings, it follows that only God possesses free will. As Luther writes against the humanist Erasmus:

It is a settled truth, then...that we do everything of necessity, and nothing by "free-will"; for the power of "free-will" is nil...It follows, therefore, that "free-will" is obviously a term applicable only to the Divine Majesty; for only He can do, and does (as the Psalmist sings) "whatever he wills in heaven and earth" (Psalm 135:6). If "free-will" is ascribed to men, it is ascribed with no more propriety than divinity itself would be – and no blasphemy could exceed that!²⁷

No one under the dominion of sin can simply "decide" to be free from it without God's intervention, nor would the person wish to be free from sin before such an intervention occurs. Salvation is wholly the work of God, so that no one may boast of his works or even his "good sense" in that he has "chosen" Christ (John 15:16; Ephesians 2:8). Even after one has become a Christian, "it is God who works in you to *will* and to *act* according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13).

Scripture teaches that God is the one who determines the thoughts and decisions of man. He exercises immediate control over the mind of man, and determines all the innate propensities and external factors relevant to him. It is God who forms a person in the womb, who determines his inward dispositions, and who arranges his outward circumstances by divine providence. It is true that the doctrine of election contradicts the free will of man,²⁸ but free will is a human invention – a sinful assumption or aspiration – and not a scriptural concept. Therefore, the "free will" objection against divine election fails because free will does not exist.

Many people think that there is a contradiction between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. They assume that human responsibility presupposes human autonomy, or free will. But if God has absolute and pervasive control over all human decisions and actions, then man is not free, and therefore divine sovereignty and human responsibility appear to be in conflict.

²⁷ Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; p. 105.

²⁸ "One of the standard objections to predestination is that it conflicts with free will. The person who makes this objection is undoubtedly correct on one thing, viz., free will and predestination are contradictory concepts. No one who knows the meanings of the terms can believe both doctrines, unless he is totally insane"; Clark, *Predestination*; p. 110.

Now, the first definition for "responsible" in *Webster's New World College Dictionary* is, "expected or obliged to account (*for* something, *to* someone); answerable; accountable."²⁹ Regardless of whether man is free or not, man is certainly "expected or obliged to account" for his actions to God. The Bible says, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked; therefore, man is responsible.

Man is responsible precisely because God is sovereign, since to be responsible means nothing more than being held accountable to one's actions, that one will be rewarded or punished according to a given standard of right and wrong. Moral responsibility has everything to do with whether God has decided to judge man and whether he has the power and authority to enforce such a decision, but it does not depend on any "free will" in man. Man is responsible because God will reward obedience and punish rebellion, but this does not at all imply that man is free to obey or rebel.

Romans 8:7 says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, *nor can it* do so." Man is responsible for his sins not because he is free or able not to sin; this verse says that he is not. But man is responsible because God has decided to judge him for his sins. Therefore, human responsibility does not presuppose human autonomy or free will, but it presupposes the absolute sovereignty of God. Divine sovereignty contradicts human autonomy, but not human responsibility.³⁰

For many people, the issue now becomes one of justice. They insist that it would be unjust for God to condemn those sinners who were never free to decide or perform otherwise, and who were created for and predestined to damnation by God in the first place. Since this objection will also be relevant when we discuss the doctrine of reprobation, we will deal with it there.

Some people find it impossible to deny that the Bible indeed teaches divine election, and that election is for salvation; nevertheless, they are not prepared to affirm that God chooses specific *individuals*. They propose that God indeed elects some for salvation, but that election is *corporate* in nature. They claim that Ephesians 1:4 supports this position: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world." Since the verse says that God's election is *in Christ*, the objection against the election of individuals for salvation is that the object of election is Christ, and whoever comes into Christ becomes one of the elect.

However, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:27-30, "But *God* chose...so that no one may boast before him. 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." The apostle says that it is God who made the choice in election so that "no one may boast before him." Against those who say that only Christ is the object of election, and that whoever

²⁹ *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.*

³⁰ "The error of Arminianism is not that it holds the Biblical doctrine of responsibility, but that it equates this doctrine with an unbiblical doctrine of free will"; Charles H. Spurgeon, "Free Will – a Slave." Also see Iain H. Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon; The Banner of Truth Trust*, 1988.

comes into him becomes God's elect, the passage says, "It is *because of him* that you are in Christ Jesus." God chooses who becomes "in Christ," and therefore divine election is in fact a selection of individuals.

In addition, corporate election fails to explain why anyone would want to come into Christ without having been individually chosen and then "dragged" to Christ by God.³¹ According to what we have already established about the depravity of man and his bondage to sin, if Christ were to be the sole object of election, no one would enter into him, and no one would be saved. For a given person to be saved, God must first choose and then directly and powerfully act on his mind. Therefore, we conclude that divine election consists of God's choice of individuals for salvation, and not the corporate church or Christ.

In any case, it is possible to refute corporate election by directly dealing with the passage in question. Ephesians 1:4-6 says:

For he *chose us* in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he *predestined us* to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Verse 4 says that he chose us "in him," with the object of God's selection as "us" and not Christ. That is, it says that he "chose us," and not that he "chose him." Verse 5 excludes corporate election when it says, "he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ." God predestined *us* – not Christ, but the individuals – to be adopted as his sons *through* Jesus Christ. Likewise, verse 6 says, "he has freely given us in the One he loves." God gives salvation to *us* in Christ; he does not give salvation to Christ and then wait for us to come into Christ by some sort of self-election.

Christ is indeed the elect or chosen one to *achieve salvation*, but he is not the elect when it comes to who would *receive salvation*. Election in the context of salvation refers to the *individuals* that God has chosen to save *through* Jesus Christ. Christ is the one chosen *to save*, and the elect are the ones chosen *to be saved*. The "in him" in verse 4 corresponds to the "through Christ Jesus" in verse 5 and the "in the One he loves" in verse 6, with all three expressions referring to him as the *means* of salvation, and not the *object* of salvation.

Another objection against the biblical doctrine of divine election is that it destroys the reason or motive for evangelism. It appears to some people that if God has predetermined

³¹ Corporate election destroys the meaning of divine election by returning to a view of salvation that amounts to self-election, since the sinner must somehow be able to choose Christ without being first chosen and enabled by God. Thus corporate election must face all the problems associated with self-election and human autonomy, which we have refuted. This unbiblical position ignores those biblical passages teaching that God selects individuals for salvation, some of which we have already listed or discussed. John 10:3 says, "He calls his own sheep *by name* and leads them out."

the identities of those who would be saved, this would render the work of evangelism meaningless.

On the surface, this seems to be an objection arising from a pious and noble concern for evangelism, but the assumption is that the only sufficient reason or motive for obeying the command of God to evangelize is that to disobey it will result in the damnation of many.

In other words, one who makes this objection against divine election is implying that he finds it meaningful to obey God in preaching the gospel only if his disobedience will cause his potential audience to suffer endless torment in hell. Although God has commanded him to preach the gospel, he has no incentive to do so unless he knows that other people will be forever condemned for his disobedience. Unless his role in the salvation or damnation of others is determinative, he finds it meaningless to obey the command of God. This objection serves to expose the moral depravity of the one who raises it, but it poses no challenge to the doctrine of election.

Faithful Christians can affirm that God's command to preach the gospel is more than enough to give meaning and purpose to evangelism. His commands are inherently meaningful, and demand obedience. In addition, we should understand that God controls both the means and the ends. He does not only determine *what* he wants to happen but also *how* he wants it to happen, and he has decided that believers should be the means by which other individuals whom he has chosen would be brought to faith in Christ. We should be grateful that God would use our preaching as the means by which he summons those he has chosen for salvation (2 Timothy 2:10).

It is true that God does not need us: "And 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). His commands toward us never reflect his need, since he has none, but they reflect his preceptive will for our lives. We preach so that those who are "appointed for eternal life" (Acts 13:48) will come to Christ, and not because they will be lost without us. Nevertheless, it means more to some people to be needed than to obey the commands of God.

The other side of the doctrine of election is the doctrine of REPROBATION. Just as God has actively chosen to save some, he has actively chosen to condemn the rest of humanity. Just as he has determined which specific individuals would be saved, he has determined which specific individuals would be damned:

Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – *prepared for destruction*? (Romans 9:21-22)

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also *what they were destined for*. (1 Peter 2:7-8)

Many people attempt to dilute this doctrine by saying that God merely "passes over" the reprobates, but the Bible teaches that he actively hardens their hearts against himself and the gospel:

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go. (Exodus 10:20)

For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses. (Joshua 11:20)

Why, O LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance. (Isaiah 63:17)

He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn – and I would heal them. (John 12:40)

Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. (Romans 9:18)

What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." (Romans 11:7-8)

We have already established that free will does not exist in finite beings, and that human responsibility has no direct relationship to free will. It is God who governs all things, including the thoughts and actions of human beings, but human beings are still responsible for their thoughts and actions precisely because God holds him accountable for their thoughts and actions by his sovereign power.

Responsibility presupposes accountability, but accountability does not presuppose ability or freedom. Accountability merely presupposes one who demands accountability. Since God demands accountability – since he will reward righteousness and punish wickedness – man is accountable. Since God is sovereign, he decides what he wants to decide, and whether human beings have free will or not never has to enter the discussion at all.

Right away the question becomes one of justice. Many people may insist that it would be unjust for God to punish those whom he has predestined to damnation, who could never decide or perform otherwise.

Paul anticipates such an objection in Romans 9:19, and writes, "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?'" He replies, "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" (v. 20). God rules by absolute authority; no one can halt his plans, and no one has the right to question him. This is true because God is the creator of all that exists, and he has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creation: "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" (v. 21).

The apostle continues to say, "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?" (v. 22-24). This is still part of the answer to the question in verse 19: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" Paul is saying that since God is sovereign, he can do whatever he wishes, including creating some vessels destined for glory, and some destined for damnation. The elect rejoice in this doctrine; the reprobate detests it. Either way, there is nothing that anyone can do about it. Peter says regarding those who reject Christ: "They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for" (1 Peter 2:8).

It is only because of impiety and irrationality that the issue of justice is even brought up against the doctrine of reprobation. The objection in its various forms amounts to the following:

1. The Bible teaches that God is just.
2. The doctrine of reprobation is unjust.
3. Therefore, the Bible does not teach the doctrine of reprobation.

Premise (2) has been assumed without warrant. By what standard is one to judge whether the doctrine of reprobation is just or unjust? If the Bible speaks of it, then it is not up to us to decide the issue. On the other hand, the Christian reasons as follows:

1. The Bible teaches that God is just.
2. The Bible affirms the doctrine of reprobation.
3. Therefore, the doctrine of reprobation is just.

The pivotal point is whether the Bible affirms the doctrine; whether it is just or unjust should not be assumed beforehand. Calvin notes:

For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it. But if you proceed further to ask why he so willed, you are seeking something greater and higher than God's will, which cannot be found. Let men's rashness, then, restrain itself, and not seek what does not exist, lest perhaps it fail to find what does exist.³²

To dictate how God's mercy is to be dispensed is evidence proving the utter sinfulness and foolish audacity of man, and not an argument against the doctrines of election and reprobation.

To better understand election and reprobation, we must fully affirm what the Bible says concerning human depravity. For example, Romans 3:10-12, 23 says, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one....for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Every human being is a sinner, and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23); therefore, justice demands that every person be damned.

The doctrines of election and reprobation do not say that the elect receive *mercy* while the non-elect receive *injustice*. Since all human beings deserve damnation, the biblical doctrines of election and reprobation teach that those whom God has chosen for salvation would receive *mercy*, and what those whom he has chosen for damnation would receive is precisely *justice* – and that is why they would be damned. God has no obligation to show mercy to anyone at all, and that he shows mercy to some does not mean that he must show mercy to all.

Once it is claimed that God is somehow required to be merciful to someone, we are no longer speaking of mercy, but justice. It is not mercy that grants what is required, but justice. Receiving justice in this case results in eternal damnation and not salvation. What is "fair" is for everyone to be damned, since our sins have rendered this the just punishment. We should be thankful that God is merciful to save anyone at all, instead of accusing him with the blasphemous charge of being unjust or not merciful enough. As Benjamin B. Warfield writes:

Shall we not fix it once for all in our minds that salvation is the right of no man; that a "chance" to save himself is no "chance" of salvation for any; and that, if any of the sinful race of man is saved, it must be by a miracle of almighty grace, on which he has no claim, and, contemplating which as a fact, he can only be filled with wondering adoration of the marvels of the inexplicable love of God? To demand that all criminals shall be given a "chance" of

³² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Edited by John T. McNeill; Translated by Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960; p. 949, (III, xxiii, 2).

escaping their penalties, and that all shall be given an "equal chance," is simply to mock at the very idea of justice, and no less, at the very idea of love.³³

Although we have no right to demand an explanation, Paul does tell us why God's work of reprobation is both good and necessary:

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:22-24)

God has "prepared for destruction" certain individuals, so that he may "show his wrath and make his power known." Paul explains that, "he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory." In other words, the reprobation of the non-elect is for the express purpose of making God's glory known to his elect.

Since the elect have been "saved from God's wrath" (Romans 5:9) by Christ, they will never have the opportunity to experience the wrathful aspect of his nature. But the wrath of God remains an essential divine attribute. As explained earlier, God's love toward his elect is characterized by his willingness to reveal himself to them (John 14:21-23, 15:15, 16:14; 1 Corinthians 2:9-12), and therefore he has prepared the reprobate for such a purpose.

We have already established that God has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creation just as a potter has the right to do whatever he wishes with his lump of clay; therefore, one cannot accuse God of being cruel or unjust for creating and predestining the reprobates for the above purpose. God is the sole moral authority, and the Bible calls him just and good; therefore, whatever he says and does is just and good by definition. It follows that his work of reprobation is thus just and good by definition, and no one can accuse God of unrighteousness – there is no standard of right and wrong outside of God by which to accuse God of wrongdoing. God is his own moral standard, and since he calls himself righteous, he must therefore be righteous.

Instead of causing us to question God's justice, the doctrine of reprobation should further enlighten us concerning God's great love for his elect. Since God governs even the reprobates to serve his own ends (Proverbs 16:4), and he "causes all things to work together" (Romans 8:28; NASB) for the good of the elect, it follows that he may manipulate the lives of the reprobates in ways that promote the good of his own chosen ones. And Scripture teaches that this is what he has been doing. Thus even the damnation of sinners is for the benefit and edification of Christians, for such is the love of God toward his chosen ones.

³³ Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*; p. 80-81.

SUMMONED

Romans 8:29-30 tells us that to those whom God has chosen for salvation, he has also given a purpose, namely, to conform to the likeness of his Son. And to those whom he has given such a purpose, he also issues a call to them in due time so that they may come to Christ. Thus the passage says, "Those he *predestined*, he also *called*" (v. 30).

Remember that all who are included in one phase of the application of redemption also enter into the next phase. All whom God has elected, he has also predestined, and all whom God has predestined, he also calls to Christ. But verse 30 goes on to say, "Those he *called*, he also *justified*." Thus all whom God calls will attain justification. And since justification is by faith in Christ, all whom God calls will believe in Christ and be justified. Therefore, God's calling toward the elect is bound to be effective, and so theologians call this act of God an EFFECTUAL CALLING.

Since the effectual calling is one whose result is guaranteed, it is not like an "invitation" that the elect may accept or reject. Rather, it is more like what we mean by the verb "to summon." In calling his elect, God does not merely invite them to do something, but God himself does something to them. Sinclair Ferguson writes, "He who calls them creates in them the ability to respond so that in the very act of his calling he brings them into new life."³⁴ Thus those whom God has chosen and predestined in eternity, he also summons to Christ in historical time.

God summons the elect usually through the preaching of the gospel. Now, Christians do not first learn the identities of the elect, and then proceed to preach the gospel only to them. Rather, they preach the gospel "to all creation," and "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). Therefore, whether it is in the form of public oration, private conversation, written literature, or other means, the preaching or presentation of the gospel goes forth to both the elect and the non-elect. The elect will come to faith; the non-elect will either reject the gospel, or produce a temporary and false profession of faith.

Because of this, theologians distinguish between the OUTWARD CALLING and the INWARD CALLING. The outward calling refers to the preaching of the gospel by human beings, and is presented to both the elect and the non-elect. On the other hand, the inward or effectual calling is a work of God accompanying the outward calling to cause the elect to come to faith in Christ. The preaching of the gospel appears to everyone as an outward calling, but it also comes as an inward summons to the elect. The outward calling is produced by human beings, but the inward calling is solely a work of God and occurs only to the elect. The inward calling is usually concurrent with the outward calling. In other words, many people may hear the gospel in a given situation, but God will cause only the elect to believe what is preached, while he hardens the non-elect against it.

³⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction*; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997 (original: 1981); p. 34.

Matthew 22:14 says, "For many are invited, but few are chosen." The word "invited" in this verse may be translated "called," as many other translations have it. Many are indeed "invited" in that they hear the outward call of the gospel, but only a few are among God's elect, and therefore genuine and permanent professions of faith only come from the latter group.

REGENERATED

We may define the sinful nature of man as the mind's strong disposition to evil (Colossians 1:21; Romans 8:5-7). REGENERATION is a work of God in which he changes such an evil disposition into one that delights in the laws and precepts of God (Ezekiel 11:19-20, 36:26-27), and this results in what amounts to a spiritual resurrection. Regeneration is a drastic and permanent transformation at the deepest level of one's personality and intellect, which we may call a RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION.³⁵ The individual's most basic commitments are turned to God from the abominable objects and principles that he once served. This change in a person's first principle of thought and conduct generates a rippling effect that transforms the entire spectrum of his worldview and lifestyle.

Regeneration, or being "born again," occurs in conjunction with God's effectual call toward his elect (1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18), and enables them to respond in faith and repentance toward Christ. This means that regeneration precedes faith; that is, one is not born again by faith, but he is enabled to believe precisely because God has first regenerated him. Faith is not the precondition of regeneration; rather, regeneration is the precondition of faith.

One reason why many Christians think that regeneration occurs by faith is because they have confused regeneration with "salvation" in general, and "justification" in particular. When the word "salvation" is applied to the sinner, it is a general term that may imply a number of things, such as the items that we are discussing in this chapter. On the other hand, in justification God confers upon the elect the legal righteousness merited by Christ in his redemptive work. The Bible teaches that we are *justified* by faith, and not that we are *regenerated* by faith. Confusion results when one considers justification and regeneration as both meaning "salvation."

Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, no one can *see* the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). The word "see" here mainly refers to the ability to understand, or "see into." Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "The god of this age has *blinded the minds* of unbelievers, so that they *cannot see* the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." If they cannot "see" the gospel, they cannot accept it, which in turn makes it impossible for them to be saved.

Matthew 13:15 makes a similar point: "For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would

³⁵ It is "radical" in the sense that it affects the very root of a person's personality.

heal them." Or, as Mark 4:12 says, "Otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" Only when one is able to *see* will one *understand*, and only when one *understands* will he be able to *turn*, that is, be "converted" (Matthew 13:15, KJV). If it is necessary to "see" before one has faith, and if the ability to "see" is only possible after regeneration (John 3:3), then naturally regeneration comes before faith.

To review, God has chosen a number of individuals to receive salvation. After this, Christ came to this earth and paid the price of sin for the elect. Then, each of the elect is summoned to believe the gospel at specific times designated by God. However, since the elect are born sinners, there is present within them a strong disposition toward evil, rendering them unable and unwilling to respond. Therefore, God regenerates the elect sinners as he summons them, and places in each of them a new nature that is disposed toward God and righteousness. Thus regeneration is a MONERGISTIC work – it is a work of God that produces its effects without any cooperation from the one being saved.

John 1:12-13 makes reference to the monergistic nature of regeneration: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (NASB). The passage indicates that regeneration does not occur by belonging to a particular bloodline, nor does it occur by "human decision" (v. 13, NIV). The popular view of regeneration is that through a "decision" for Christ, man can become born again, and thus saved from sin. However, Scripture teaches that regeneration is wholly a work of God that he effects in his chosen ones, and that it does not occur through the will of man: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

It is easy to understand why regeneration must precede faith if we keep in mind that man is spiritually dead before regeneration (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 3:10-12, 23). Because of the mind's hostility to the things of God before regeneration, the elect by themselves would never come to faith in Christ when presented with the gospel. It is God who acts first, and having changed their disposition from evil to good, and from darkness to light, they then respond to the gospel by faith in Christ, and thereby becomes justified in God's sight. Acts 16:14 records the conversion of Lydia, and the verse says that it was God who first "opened her heart" so that she could "respond to Paul's message."

CONVERTED

After God has regenerated him, the elect individual now "sees" the truth of the gospel and responds to the effectual call by undergoing CONVERSION, which consists of repentance and faith. The message of Jesus to the people was, "*Repent and believe* the good news!" (Mark 1:15). And he reprimanded "the chief priests and the elders of the people," that they did not "*repent and believe*" (Matthew 21:23, 32) under the ministry of John the Baptist.

The word "conversion" signifies a turning, and includes both the concepts of repentance and faith. *Repentance* is the part of conversion in which a person turns from sin, while

faith is when he turns to Christ for salvation. The close connection between repentance and faith is also indicated in Hebrews 6:1, where it says the "elementary teachings about Christ" consists of "repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God." The writer calls this the "foundation" or beginning of the Christian life.

In REPENTANCE, the sinner first comes to a true intellectual realization of his sinful condition. Since God has already regenerated him, he finds this sinful condition repugnant and determines to turn from both the lifestyle consisting of sins and the individual acts of sins.

Repentance is volitional and not emotional. Although much emotion may at times accompany the turning of the mind, it is not a necessary or defining element. Of course, a mental state consisting of nothing more than an emotional upheaval over one's sins and shortcomings without a volitional act of turning does not constitute repentance, and therefore will not result in faith and justification.

Conversion does not result only in a negative change, in which one turns from idols, but Paul states that the elect individual also turns "to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Further, a definite system of theology has been added to the person's thinking, replacing the former unbiblical worldview. This is the aspect of conversion that we call FAITH.

Many theologians propose that faith consists of three elements: knowledge, assent, and trust. But the following will show that faith consists of only knowledge and assent, and that trust is only shorthand for assent.

KNOWLEDGE refers to the intellectual retention and comprehension of true propositions. This is a necessary element of faith since it is impossible to believe something without knowing what to believe. If one does not know what X represents, he cannot answer the question, "Do you believe in X?" Faith is impossible without knowledge.

God grants knowledge to an individual as the first element of saving faith usually through the preaching or presentation of the gospel. As the apostle Paul writes, "And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14). Knowledge also implies understanding in this case. Just as it is impossible to believe in X while it remains undefined, so one cannot believe in something while the definition is not understood. Since the gospel is always presented in propositional form, the knowledge and understanding necessary for faith refer to the mental retention and comprehension of the meaning of the verbal statements presented.

ASSENT is agreement to the understood propositions. Although anyone may gain some understanding of the gospel message, not everyone will agree that it is true. It is easy for one to explain to another the scriptural claim of the resurrection of Christ, but whether the hearer will agree that it had in fact occurred is a different matter. As mentioned, the evil disposition of the unregenerate mind prevents one from assenting to the gospel regardless

of the preacher's persuasiveness. Therefore, one must first be regenerated by God, so as to gain a new disposition favorable to the gospel, after which one will readily give assent to the gospel.

Since many theologians think that the non-elect can truly assent to the gospel without "personal trust" in Christ, they also argue that knowledge and assent are not sufficient to save. One must add to knowledge and assent the third element of TRUST, which they define as a personal and relational reliance on the person of Christ. They say that although the objects of knowledge and assent are propositions, the object of trust must be a person, namely, Christ. That is, saving faith believes in Christ as a person, and not a set of propositions.

Although not all theologians distinguish faith into these three elements, many of them define it in ways that amount to claiming that saving faith must move from the intellectual to the relational, the propositional to the personal, and from assent to trust. To them, assent corresponds to a "believe *that*" faith, while trust is a "believe *in*" faith. Assent believes *that* certain things *about* Christ are true, but trust goes beyond that to believe *in* the *person* of Christ. Faith is belief *in* a person, not certain facts *about* the person. They point to passages demanding a faith that believes *in* the gospel. For example, Acts 16:31 says, "Believe *in* the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved," and 1 John 3:23 says, "This is his command: to believe *in* the name of his Son, Jesus Christ."

However, there are conclusive reasons to reject this distinction between assent and trust, and instead to affirm that faith consists only of knowledge and assent.

First, the Bible does not exclusively use the "believe in" type of language when referring to faith. For example, Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe *that* he exists and *that* he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The verse demands that one who comes to God must give assent to two propositions. He must believe *that* (1) "God exists," and *that* (2) "God rewards those who earnestly seek him." The writer says that such faith can "please God," and that "the ancients were commended for" having it (v. 2).

Second, the New Testament indicates that to believe *in* Christ means to believe *that* certain propositions are true:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: *that* Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, *that* he was buried, *that* he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and *that* he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.
(1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

Third, we may demonstrate by an analysis of language that to believe *in* (or "trust") a person is simply shorthand for believing *that* (or "assent") certain propositions about him are true.

For example, there are two ways to understand the question, "Do you believe *in* the devil?" The question may either be asking whether one believes *that* the devil exists, or whether he believes *that* the devil is worthy of worship.³⁶ That is, the question implies one of the two propositions, and asks the hearer to affirm or deny it. A Christian would affirm the first and deny the second. However, unless the context of the conversation establishes the meaning of the question, or unless the hearer makes an assumption as to the meaning of the question if the context does not provide it, it is impossible to tell which of the two propositions the hearer is being asked to affirm or deny.

If D = "the devil," e = "exists," and w = "worthy of worship," then "I believe *in* D " may mean either "I believe *that* D_e " or "I believe *that* D_w ." Either way, "I believe *in* D " must represent either of the two "believe *that*" statements, and thus it is nothing more than a shorthand for one of them.

Likewise, "I believe *in* God" is a meaningless statement unless it is reducible to one or more "believe *that*" propositions. In the context of Hebrews 11:6, if G = "God," e = "exists," and r = "rewarder," then "I believe *in* G " appears to have three possible meanings:³⁷

1. "I believe *that* G_e "
2. "I believe *that* G_r "
3. "I believe *that* $G_e + G_r$ "

Hebrews 11:6 calls for a faith that affirms (3), without which one cannot please God; it is a "believe *that*" kind of faith. Also, note that to believe *in* X may imply a "believe *that*" faith in more than one proposition. In Hebrews 11:6, to have faith means to believe *that* $G_e + G_r$.

Therefore, we may conclude that "I believe *in* X " is simply shorthand for "I believe *that* $X_1 + X_2 + X_3 \dots X_n$." This means that to believe or have faith *in* something or someone is to believe or have faith *that* one or more propositions about that something or someone are true. To have faith *in* God and *in* Christ is precisely to believe something *about* them – to have a "believe *that*" faith. To say that faith is belief or trust in a person instead of assent to propositions and that faith must go beyond the intellectual may sound more pious or intimate to some people, but this kind of faith is a meaningless concept. A faith that does not "believe *that*" certain propositions are true does not believe anything at all; the content of this so-called faith is undefined.

Many people claim that James 2:19 is opposed to this view of faith that is only intellectual and propositional. The verse says, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder." To them, this verse indicates that merely to

³⁶ There are other possibilities depending on the context of the conversation, but we will settle with these two for our purpose.

³⁷ It is impossible to affirm (2) by itself, since one cannot believe that God is one who rewards those who seek him unless he first believes that God exists – unless what is meant is that God *would be* one who rewards those who seek him *if* (1) is true, although the person denies it.

"believe *that* there is one God," is good because it is assent to a true proposition, but it is not a saving faith. Even the demons, and by implication the non-elect, may have this kind of "faith," and therefore it fails to distinguish the kind of faith that saves with a "mere" intellectual agreement to the gospel.

However, this objection ignores the context of the passage. Verse 17 says, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." True faith results in behavior that corresponds with the content of one's beliefs. The demons "believe" that there is one God, but they do not act in a way that corresponds with such a belief. Instead of worshiping him as God, they merely shudder and rebel against him.

What James says does not challenge what I have written about faith, but serves to clarify it. He is saying that true faith produces actions that correspond to the assent claimed. Nowhere does he say that the alternative to the "faith" of demons is some sort of "personal trust." Rather, what he says makes it necessary to include in our definition of faith that true assent implies obedience to the necessary implications of the propositions affirmed.

For example, assuming that one has correctly defined "God," to believe *that* "There is one God" (James 2:19) also demands one to worship him, since the word denotes the ultimate being that is inherently worthy of worship. That the demons do not worship "God" implies that they either refuse to acknowledge the full meaning of the word, or they, being fully aware of its implications, refuse to grant it complete assent.

A comment by Sinclair Ferguson on faith exhibits the common confusion about assent and trust:

Faith is more than assent, but it is never less than assent. Thomas' faith in the risen Christ was assent to the fact of the resurrection. But it was more. It was a heart which acknowledged, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).³⁸

However, there is no difference between, "A heart which acknowledged," and "A mind which assented."³⁹ He is making a pious-sounding but meaningless distinction. Further, "My Lord and my God!" is not a person but a proposition. Therefore, although Ferguson seems to be unaware of it, he agrees with us that Thomas' faith amounts to "A mind which assented to a proposition," and that faith is not "more" than assent.

All of the above considerations result in a biblical definition of faith. Since the nature of faith is assent to knowledge, and this knowledge denotes a retention and understanding of one or more propositions, *faith is voluntary assent to propositions understood*, and *assent* here implies obedience to the demands inherently present in the said propositions.

³⁸ Ferguson, *The Christian Life*; p. 66.

³⁹ "Acknowledge" is just another word for "assent," and we have previously established that the heart is the mind or intellect.

The source of these propositions to which one must give assent is the Bible. While *saving* faith consists of assent to certain propositions related to the redemptive work of Christ, biblical faith in general continues to abide and develop in the Christian as he assents to these same propositions along with other ones in the Bible, and thus he grows in spiritual maturity.

Instead of using the word "trust" to distinguish true and false faith, we only need to distinguish *true* assent from *false* assent, or true faith from false faith. True assent means an intellectual agreement with propositions understood that results in obedience to the full implications of the propositions. On the other hand, a person with false assent to biblical propositions claims that he agrees with the Scripture but does not produce the thoughts, speech, and behavior necessarily implied by such an agreement.

Salvation by grace through faith is a gift of God: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Thus faith cannot be manufactured by man, but it can only be given to him. This is consistent with what we have said concerning the monergistic nature of salvation thus far, that from election to regeneration, and now to repentance and faith, salvation is solely the work of God and not of man. Therefore, no one may boast even about his acceptance of the gospel.

Without God's work of regeneration in which he changes the disposition and volition of man, no one can or will truly assent to the biblical propositions about God and Christ. Our definition indicates that faith has a volitional element, in that it is a *voluntary* assent to the gospel. The will of the unregenerate man cannot assent to the gospel, but one who has been regenerated by God has also been *made* willing to accept Christ; God has changed his will. Therefore, God does not "compel" a person to faith in the sense of forcing him to believe what he consciously refuses to accept, but God "compels" a change in the person's will by regeneration so that his assent to the gospel is indeed voluntary. That is, faith is voluntary in the sense that the elect person does decide to accept the gospel, but he only does this because God causes him to so decide; without God's power to "compel" or change the will, no one would decide to accept the gospel.

Now, Jesus says in John 7:17, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." But Romans 8:7 says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor *can* it do so." Since the sinful mind *cannot* submit to God, it must mean that the person who "chooses to do God's will" has already been changed by God, so that his disposition is no longer sinful but righteous. He then willingly chooses to do the will of God, and becomes able to discern that the gospel is true. This again implies that regeneration must precede faith, and that faith itself is a gift from God.

JUSTIFIED

Christians are accustomed to thinking that "salvation" comes by faith, especially in opposition to works. JUSTIFICATION is an act of God by which he declares the elect sinner to be righteous on the basis of Christ's righteousness. Since justification refers to

Christ's righteousness being legally credited to the elect, and thus precedes many of the other items in the application of redemption, in a sense, one is not in error who says that faith leads to the subsequent items in the order of salvation to which justification is the precondition. For example, Acts 26:18 says that the elect are "*sanctified by faith.*"

Nevertheless, regeneration precedes both faith and justification, and is never said to follow or result from faith, nor is it ever confused with justification. It is *regeneration* that leads to *faith*, and it is *faith* that leads to our *justification*.

In other words, having chosen certain individuals to be saved, God sent Christ to die for them and thus paid for their sins. In due time, God changes their sinful disposition to one that delights in his will and laws. As a result, these individuals respond to the gospel in faith, which in turn leads to a legal declaration by God that they have been made righteous in his sight.

Therefore, faith is our divinely-enabled response to God's effectual calling, and justification is his response to our faith, which came from him in the first place. Paul writes that all who are predestined by God are also called, and since the call is an effective one, all who are called in this manner also respond in faith, and are therefore justified (Romans 8:30).

Scripture asserts that justification comes by faith, and not works. Examples of passages in support of this include the following:

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:39)

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus....For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. (Romans 3:20-24, 28)

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (Romans 4:4-5)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2)

Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)

In light of the biblical emphasis on justification by faith alone, especially in the writings of Paul, some believers are confused by some of the verses in James 2. For example, verse 24 says, "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." But the difficulty disappears when we note how the term is used and pay attention to the context.

Note that we are discussing how one word is being used by two different biblical writers. Although we may be assured that all writers of Scripture agree in theology, they do not always use the same words to express the same concepts, and they do not always use the same words with exactly the same meaning or emphasis. For example, although John does not use the word "justification," his writings teach that one is saved by faith alone just as strongly as the writings of Paul.⁴⁰ We will only list several examples here:

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:18)

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28-29)

But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins." (John 8:23-24)

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)

⁴⁰ We can find another example in the doctrine of election. John emphasizes the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation just as much as Paul, but the two use different words to teach the same doctrine.

With the understanding that the same word may be used with different meanings by different biblical writers, we may accept the following explanation by Robert Reymond:

Whereas Paul intends by "justified" the *actual* act on God's part whereby he pardons and imputes righteousness to the ungodly, James intends by "justified" the verdict God *declares* when the *actually* (previously) justified man has *demonstrated* his actual righteous state by obedience and good works....

Whereas Paul, when he repudiates "works," is referring to "the works of the law," that is, any and every work of *whatever* kind done for the sake of acquiring merit, James intends by "works" acts of kindness toward those in need performed as the fruit and evidence of the actual justified state and a true and vital faith (James 2:14-17)....

And whereas Paul believed with all his heart that men are justified by *faith alone*, he insists as strongly as James that such faith, *if alone*, is not true but dead faith: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. [What counts] is faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6), which is hardly different in meaning from James's expression: "faith was working together with [Abraham's] works, and by works his faith was perfected" (James 2:22). Paul can also speak of the Christian's "work of faith" (1 Thess. 1:3). And in the very context where he asserts that we are saved by grace through faith and "not by works," Paul can declare that we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10). In sum, whereas for James "faith without works in dead," for Paul "faith working through love" is inevitable if it is true faith.⁴¹

Paul wanted to show that justification in the sense of the initial legal declaration of righteousness by God comes only by faith in the work of Christ, but James was more concerned with showing that if such faith does not result in a righteous lifestyle, that faith is not true faith in the first place, and the legal declaration of righteousness by God never happened at all. Since one is saved not *by* good works but *for* good works (Ephesians 2:10), a person does not need to produce good works to be saved, but if he does not produce good works after he claims to be saved, then he has never been saved.

Thus James did not deny that legal righteousness comes by faith alone – that was not his topic – but he wanted to challenge his readers to demonstrate that their faith was genuine: "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (James 2:18). His emphasis was not in how one attains legal righteousness, but how one who claims to have attained such righteousness should behave: "Religion that God our Father

⁴¹ Reymond, *Systematic Theology*; p. 750.

accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

The legal nature of justification means that the righteousness credited to the elect is an IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS rather than an INFUSED RIGHTEOUSNESS. God sent Christ to pay for the sins of the elect, then he grants faith to the elect as the means by which to legally credit the positive righteousness of Christ to them. The righteousness bestowed upon the elect is thus not one that they have earned or produced by themselves, but one that has been generated by Christ and given to them as a gift. Therefore, when we affirm that justification is *by faith alone*, we are in fact affirming that justification is not by our own efforts, which can never attain justification, but that our justification is *by Christ alone*, who has attained justification for us.

Since justification involves a legal declaration, it is an instantaneous act. One is either justified or unjustified; one does not become justified gradually, but he is declared righteous instantly when he believes the gospel. Therefore, the concept of justification excludes the process by which the believer grows in knowledge and holiness, which is part of sanctification.

Christians who affirm justification by faith alone nevertheless often confuse imputed righteousness and infused righteousness. Justification is imputed righteousness, and sanctification is infused righteousness. Justification is an instant declaration of righteousness, but sanctification refers to a believer's spiritual growth after he has been justified by God.

ADOPTED

Having been declared righteous by God, ADOPTION is an act of God whereby he makes the justified elect into members of his family.

Some people think that every human being is a child of God. Against this misconception, the Bible instead teaches that every non-Christian is a child of the devil:

The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one. (Matthew 13:38)

Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (John 6:70)

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? (Acts 13:10)

He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. (1 John 3:8)

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:10)

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. (1 John 3:12)

On the other hand, those who are saved by Christ have also been made the children of God:

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8:14-17, NASB)

It is no small matter to be called the children and heirs of God. Perhaps this doctrine has been so diluted and abused in Christian circles and in the world so that we are not as in awe with it as we should be: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him" (1 John 3:1).

An important implication of having been adopted into the family of God is that we may now relate to him as our Heavenly Father, and that we may now have fellowship with other Christians as true family members. In fact, the bond between Christians ought to be stronger than that which exists between natural family members. We have been bound together by the will of God, the blood of Christ, and a common faith.

Most people assume that the Bible teaches us to treat others in an impartial way. For example, one should not give special treatment to a rich man just because he is rich (James 2:1-9). However, the Bible does not teach that we must treat all people alike; rather, we are to give certain people the priority: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let

us do good to all people, *especially* to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). We are to put Christians first when providing assistance to other people.

We must be careful to avoid confusing adoption with other items in the benefits of redemption. For example, regeneration is spiritual resurrection, which enables the individual to respond positively to God, but one does not become a child of God through it. It is possible for a rational creature to be spiritually alive without being a member of God's family in the sense denoted by adoption. Angels may be an example of this class of beings.

In addition, adoption is not justification. It would be possible for God to legally declare one to be righteous without also making this person a son through adoption. One who has been regenerated and justified already stands righteous before God, and will never be condemned (Romans 8:33). But the doctrine of adoption further enlightens us as to the extent of God's love toward his elect, that in addition to saving them from sin and hell, he would make them his children and heirs.

Several items in the benefits of redemption have been distorted by some people to denote deification; the doctrines of regeneration and glorification are especially prone to abuse. A proper understanding of adoption should help us in avoiding this error. One preacher said the following:

Peter said it just as plain, he said, "We are partakers of the divine nature." That nature is life eternal in absolute perfection. And that was imparted, injected into your spirit man, and you have that imparted into you by God just the same as you imparted into your child the nature of humanity. That child wasn't born a whale! [It was] born a human. Isn't that true? Well, now, you don't *have* a human, do you? You *are* one. You don't *have* a god in you. You *are* one.⁴²

This preacher either meant something else and was being misleading, which implies extreme carelessness and utter disregard for the preaching ministry, or he meant what he said, which constitutes blasphemy of the most horrific kind. In other words, if this was just a bad choice of words, then it was a *very* bad choice of words; if it was a good choice of words, then it was a *very* blasphemous doctrine. Either error is sufficient to result in his dismissal from the ministry, if not excommunication from the church.

Jesus is God's "one and only Son" (John 3:16; see also John 3:18, 1 John 4:9); he has a unique place before God and a unique relationship with God. We are God's *adopted* children, and regeneration did not make us part of the Trinity! That Jesus is also referred

⁴² Kenneth Copeland, "The Force of Love" (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries), cassette tape #02-0028. Cited in John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Choas*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992; p. 331. When Paul Crouch said, "I *am* a little god!" Copeland responded, "Yes! Yes!" Again, when Crouch said, "I *am* a little god! Critic, be gone!" Copeland responded, "You are anything that He is." *Ibid.*, p. 332-333.

to as the "*firstborn*" (Romans 8:29) denotes his preeminence among God's creation and his elect in accordance with the Hebrew mindset, and does not mean that we are God's subsequent children in the same sense and in the same order of God the Son. For example, Colossians 1:15 says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." This does not mean that the universe and the planets are also God's children.

SANCTIFIED

The word SANCTIFICATION may be used in two senses. DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION refers to the new believer's instant and decisive break from the dominion of sin when he comes to faith in Christ. God has consecrated and separated him from the world. But in this section, we are interested in PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION, which refers to the believer's gradual growth in knowledge and holiness, so that having received *legal* righteousness in justification, he may now develop *personal* righteousness in his thought and behavior.

Some people make the mistake of thinking that the whole of sanctification is like justification in the sense of being an immediate act of God whereby he causes us to achieve perfect holiness in thought and conduct, and thus imply that true Christians would no longer commit sin at all. However, although it has a definite point of beginning at regeneration, the Bible describes sanctification as a growth process, so that one increasingly thinks and behaves in a way that is pleasing to God, and conforms to the likeness of Christ.

A number of passages in the Bible may give the impression that one ceases to sin altogether after regeneration. For example, 1 John 3:9 says, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." But this verse is only saying that one who is born of God does not continue in sin, and not that he does not sin at all. In fact, earlier he writes, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1:8). That is, a regenerated person should exhibit a definite transformation in his thought and behavior. Perfection is not in view here, but an unmistakable turn from evil thinking and living toward holy thinking and living.

In the same letter, the apostle John writes, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). The atoning work of Christ has effectively paid for not only those sins we had committed before regeneration, but also those subsequent to it. However, John does not write this to grant us the liberty to sin, but instead he says, "I write this to you so that you *will not* sin." The verse also shows that he does not demand the Christian to have achieved sinless perfection, since he makes provision for one who does sin, saying, "But *if* anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense."

Hebrews 12:4 presents sanctification as partly a "struggle against sin," but the Bible also tells us it is one that we can win. Paul writes:

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:13-14)

Sin is not our master, so we do not need to obey it. We have been set free from sin so that we may now live righteous lives.

As with all the areas of our spiritual life, the way we grow in holiness involves the intellect and volition, or the understanding and the will. Peter writes, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the *knowledge* of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our *knowledge* of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:2-3). We grow in spiritual maturity first through knowledge. It would be impossible to shun wickedness and pursue righteousness without a clear conception of what wickedness and righteousness mean, and what kinds of thoughts and actions come under each. As for our volition, Paul writes, "*Count* yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11).

As with all the items that this chapter discusses, sanctification is a work of God; however, it is SYNERGISTIC in nature, meaning that in a sense it is also a work of man, and requires his deliberate will and effort in the process. On this subject, Paul writes:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:12-13)⁴³

The believer is to actively take his part in sanctification, so that he pursues a life of obedience to God "in fear and trembling."

Nevertheless, the passage continues to explain that even the working out of our salvation is ultimately a work of God: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Our decisions and actions remain under God's control after regeneration and sanctification. Therefore, although one is conscious of his efforts and struggles in sanctification, in the end God gets the glory, and the believer still cannot boast of his own achievements.

⁴³ The word "salvation" should not be confused with justification, since Paul is not speaking of attaining legal righteousness before God in this passage. Regeneration, justification, sanctification, and so forth all come under the general term "salvation," and so the reader should pay attention to the context to see in what sense is the term being used. Here Paul admonishes the believers to exert conscious effort in their spiritual growth, or sanctification.

PRESERVED

All who goes through one phase of the application of redemption will also experience the next phase. For example, all whom God has predestined, he will summon to salvation in due time. Now, Romans 8:30 says, "Those he *justified*, he also *glorified*." This statement necessarily implies that all who experience justification will also experience glorification; no one who is justified will failed to be glorified. Since glorification refers to the consummation of God's saving work in the elect, this means that once an individual has been justified in God's sight, his legal righteousness will never be lost. Since all those who are justified will also be glorified, true Christians will never lose their salvation.

This doctrine is often called the PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS, and also ETERNAL SECURITY in some circles. These terms are accurate, since true believers do consciously persevere in faith and the elect are indeed eternally secure in their salvation. However, many biblical passages dealing with this topic emphasize that it is God who actively preserves the believer from the beginning to the end of his salvation, that Jesus is "the *author and perfecter* of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). This being the case, PRESERVATION is a better term. It reflects the fact that God is ultimately the one who maintains the Christian's salvation, and not the believer himself.

Favoring the perspective of preservation does not deny that the believer must deliberately improve and consciously struggle in order to persevere. It is unbiblical to say that since it is God who ultimately keeps us, that we therefore need not exercise any conscious effort in our spiritual development. "Let go, and let God," a popular phrase that probably came from the Keswick movement, is unbiblical as applied to sanctification. However, the word "preservation" helps to remind us that it is God who grants and causes any improvement and stability in our growth in knowledge and holiness, even if we are painfully aware of the efforts we have exerted toward our spiritual development.

There are many biblical passages teaching that God preserves those whom he has elected, regenerated, and justified:

I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. (Jeremiah 32:40)

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. (John 6:37-39)

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. (John 10:28-29)

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:8)

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. (2 Timothy 1:12)

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:18)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ. (Jude 1)

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority,

through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)

The doctrine of preservation does not say that anyone who makes a profession of faith in Christ is then saved and will never be lost, since his profession may be false. Rather, the doctrine teaches that *true* Christians will never be lost. They will never permanently turn from Christ, although some of them may even fall deeply into sin for a time.

A true Christian is one who has given true assent to the gospel, and whose "sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5) becomes evident through a lasting transformation of thoughts, speech, and behavior in conformity to the demands of Scripture. John says that one who is regenerated "cannot go on sinning" (1 John 3:9). On the other hand, a person who produces a profession of Christ out of a false assent to the gospel may last "only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away" (Matthew 13:21).

Sometimes even the elect may fall into serious sin, but such a fall is never permanent. Nevertheless, while a person is living a sinful lifestyle, we have no reason to believe his profession of faith at that moment, and therefore should think of him as an unbeliever. Jesus teaches that a stubborn refusal to repent is sufficient reason for excommunication:

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (Matthew 18:15-17)

Since he is considered an unbeliever, he cannot be a candidate for marriage by a Christian, he cannot participate in communion, and he cannot hold any ministerial responsibilities. He may indeed be a true Christian, but there is no way to be certain of this while he remains in sin. Instead, he should be considered and treated as an unbeliever, along with all the implications of such an assumption. "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10).

Those who fall away and never repent have never been truly saved. John says, "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" (1 John 2:19). Judas appeared to have followed Jesus for several years, but Jesus says, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (John 6:70). Verse 64 explains, "For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him."

So it was not as if Judas had true faith, and then fell into sin and lost his salvation, but he never had true faith at all. Jesus chose Judas knowing that he would be the traitor: "While

I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled" (John 17:12). This verse presupposes divine election, and explicitly teaches the doctrines of preservation and reprobation. Jesus kept safe the eleven, who were among the elect, but Judas was lost because he had never been saved in the first place; he was among the reprobates, "doomed to destruction."

On the other hand, those among the elect who appear to fall from their faith nevertheless retain their salvation, and they will return to Christ according to God's power to preserve them. For example, even before Peter denied Christ, he was told, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). It is true that if one's faith is truly lost, then he has also lost his salvation; however, it is God himself who prevents the faith of his elect from failing. And just as Jesus prayed for Peter, he is now praying for all Christians, so that no matter what spiritual problems they appear to be experiencing, in the end their faith will not fail:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. (John 17:20)

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

Jesus made no such prayer for Judas, but he only prays for his elect: "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours" (John 17:9).

One of the most common objections to this doctrine states that if it is true that the believer cannot lose his salvation, then this constitutes an implicit license to sin. The Christian may sin all he wants, and yet remains secure in Christ. However, the true Christian does not wish to live in sin, although he may occasionally stumble. The true believer detests sin and loves righteousness. One who sins without restraint is not a Christian at all.

There are a number of biblical passages that command Christians to pursue righteousness and shun wickedness. Some of these passages are so strong in expression and contain warnings so ominous that some people misinterpret them as saying that it is possible for a true believer to lose his salvation. For example, Hebrews 6:4-6 says the following:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

First, whatever the passage means, it does not say that the elect will in fact renounce his faith. Let us assume that the passage is indeed saying that if one falls away from faith after reaching a certain stage of spiritual development he would indeed lose his salvation. This does not challenge the doctrine of preservation – in fact, we may heartily agree with it. If the elect sincerely and permanently renounces Christ, then he loses his salvation. However, we have already read a number of verses saying that this will never happen, that the true believer will never sincerely and permanently renounce Christ, and the above passage says nothing to contradict this. John says that those who depart from the faith have never been truly with the faith.

Second, several verses later, the writer explicitly states that what this passage describes will not happen to his readers: "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case – things that accompany salvation" (Hebrews 6:9). To paraphrase, he is saying, "Although we are talking this way, I am sure that when it comes to salvation, this will not happen to you."

Third, we must remember that God uses various means by which he accomplishes his ends. For example, although he has unchangeably determined the identities of those who would be saved, he does not save these people without means. Rather, he saves the elect by means of the preaching of the gospel, and by means of the faith in Christ that he places within them. God uses various means to accomplish his ends, and he chooses and controls both the means and the ends.

Accordingly, just because we are told that the elect will persevere in faith does not mean that God does not warn them against apostasy. In fact, these scriptural warnings about the consequences of renouncing the Christian faith is one of the means by which God will prevent his elect from apostasy. The reprobates will ignore these warnings, but the elect will heed them (John 10:27), and so they will continue to work on their sanctification "with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Concerning the words of God, Psalm 19:11 says, "By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."