

# INTEGRITY

## *A Journal of Christian Thought*

PUBLISHED BY THE COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL INTEGRITY  
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### *Editor*

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Pastor, Cross Timbers Free Will Baptist Church

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# Contents

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| Introduction .....  | 7-9     |
| PAUL V. HARRISON  |         |
| The Matchless Christ .....  | 11-17   |
| ROBERT J. MORGAN  |         |
| Expository Preaching: In Need of Redemption? .....  | 19-32   |
| JEFF MANNING  |         |
| The Old Testament As the Christian's Book .....   | 33-53   |
| GARNETT H. REID   |         |
| Hell in the New Testament .....   | 55-83   |
| ROBERT E. PICIRILLI   |         |
| A Plea for Unabridged Christianity .....  | 85-102  |
| F. LEROY FORLINES   |         |
| Prolegomena to Christian Apologetics:   |         |
| Being, Knowing, and Doing .....   | 103-120 |
| STEPHEN M. ASHBY  |         |
| Will the Real Arminius Please Stand Up? A Study of the<br>Theology of Jacobus Arminius in Light of His Interpreters ... | 121-139 |
| J. MATTHEW PINSON   |         |
| The Church Fathers and Baptism .....  | 141-155 |
| WILLIAM F. DAVIDSON   |         |

## Book Reviews ..... 157-189

*Hard Sayings of the Bible.*

By Walter C. Kaiser *et al* ..... Wendell Walley

*Orthodoxy.*

By G. K. Chesterton ..... Ben Franklin

*The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform.*

By Roger E. Olson ..... David Outlaw

*BioEngagement: Making a Christian Difference through Bioethics Today.*

By Nigel M. de S. Cameron *et al.*, eds. .... Paul J. Gentuso

*Bioethics: A Christian Approach in a Pluralistic Age.*

By Scott B. Rae and Paul M. Cox. .... Mark R. Paschall

*The Free Will Baptists in History.*

By William F. Davidson ..... Jack Williams

*Four Views on Eternal Security.*

J. Matthew Pinson, ed. .... A. B. Brown

*Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation:*

*Calvinism and Arminianism.* By Robert E. Picirilli ..... Ronald J. Callaway

*The Quest for Truth: Answering Life's Inescapable Questions.*

By F. Leroy Forlines ..... Stephen M. Ashby

*Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader.*

Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds. .... Patsy Vanhook

*Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions.*

By John Piper ..... Tom McCullough

*The Reformed Pastor.*

By Richard Baxter ..... Dennis Wiggs

*Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices.*

By Thomas Brooks ..... Paul V. Harrison

# Contributors

STEPHEN M. ASHBY

Dean of the Faculty, Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College  
Moore, Oklahoma

WILLIAM F. DAVIDSON

Professor Emeritus of Church History,  
Columbia Biblical Seminary and School of Missions,  
A Division of Columbia International University  
Columbia, South Carolina

F. LEROY FORLINES

Professor Emeritus of Theology,  
Free Will Baptist Bible College  
Nashville, Tennessee

JEFF MANNING

Pastor, Unity Free Will Baptist Church  
Greenville, North Carolina

ROBERT J. MORGAN

Pastor, Donelson Free Will Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee

ROBERT E. PICIRILLI

Professor Emeritus of Greek and Philosophy,  
Free Will Baptist Bible College  
Nashville, Tennessee

J. MATTHEW PINSON

President, Free Will Baptist Bible College  
Nashville, Tennessee

GARNETT H. REID

Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew,  
Free Will Baptist Bible College  
Nashville, Tennessee



# Introduction

We are pleased to send forth this second volume of *Integrity*. Our prayer is that the Lord will use it to glorify himself.

When God created the universe, it became incumbent upon man to examine that creation carefully in an effort, among other things, to see the mind of the Creator, or, to use the words of Johann Kepler, "to think God's thoughts after him." Indeed, "the heavens declare the glory of God," and man is privileged and obligated to listen to and analyze that amazing declaration of nature.

Similarly, when God chose to speak, it became incumbent upon man to study words and specifically God's Word. This responsibility especially rests upon ministers. Unfortunately, our fallen state makes this task of studying God's words laborious. We find the disciplines of theology, philosophy, history, and foreign languages difficult, to mention just a few of the subjects involved. Ultimately, since all truth is God's truth, only the broadest of parameters will encompass the Christian's field of inquiry.

The breadth and difficulty of the task of seeking God's truth often lead to feelings that the effort is futile. Who is sufficient for these things? we ask. Surrender to such feelings often follows. Coupled with the enormity of the task is our inborn laziness, which also drags many a would-be student, including many ministers, into mental lethargy. Unfortunately, the result is that few men of God are in danger of facing the accusation Festus launched at the great Apostle Paul: "Much learning doth make thee mad."

We live in a new and exciting information age, and it has bred a world of experts. Each field of endeavor contains a mass of facts. Doctors and lawyers have more medical and legal data at their disposal than ever before. While we do not expect them to know everything, we do hold them to the highest of standards, especially when they are diagnosing our illness or handling our case. We even expect our automobile mechanics to be masters of engine repair. Ministers are likewise expected to be proficient in the fields of Bible and theology. We dare not insist on higher standards for those under the hood than we do for those behind the pulpit.

This journal attempts to assist in the grand pursuit of the study of God. Its articles seek to help you to love the Lord your God with all your heart, strength, and mind. While providing instruction relevant to laity, it especially aims at ministers, that group who must forever feel the tension Phillips Brooks wrote of in his *Lectures on Preaching*:

The two parts of a preacher's work [shepherding and preaching] are always in rivalry. When you find that you can never sit down to study and write without the faces of the people, who you know need your care, looking at you from the paper; and yet you never can go out among your people without hearing your forsaken study reproaching you, and calling you home, you may easily come to believe that it would be good indeed if you could be one or other of two things, and not both; either a preacher or a pastor, but not the two together. But I assure you you are wrong.

May this collection of articles and reviews help us all to fulfill our multifaceted obligations.

We begin this issue with a sermon by Robert Morgan. Most of Reverend Morgan's sermons are expository, but we include this topical sermon to illustrate that such an approach can be challenging and profitable. It is followed by a study of expository preaching by Jeff Manning. Next comes an article by Garnett Reid focused on the Old Testament and its usefulness to the Christian. Robert Picirilli then unfolds the New Testament teaching on hell. "A Plea for Unabridged Christianity" follows, in which Leroy Forlines challenges believers to develop a full-orbed understanding of God's truth. Then Stephen Ashby offers insight into doing apologetics in today's world. Rounding out the articles are two studies in church history. Matt Pinson examines the theological outlook of James Arminius, and William Davidson analyzes the attitudes of the early church fathers on baptism.

As in the first issue, we conclude with book reviews. Thirteen books are evaluated and recommended, their focus ranging from bioethics to missions, from Bible difficulties to devotional reading.

Appreciation is expressed to all who have given of themselves to make this project possible. Special thanks go to the Executive Department of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, Free Will Baptist Bible College, Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College, and Randall House Publications. Also greatly appreciated are the efforts of the previous editor Matt Pinson and the current assistant editor Robert Picirilli.



It is the distinct privilege of the Commission for Theological Integrity to serve Free Will Baptists and to present this issue as a part of our ongoing ministry. May God employ it in his grand enterprise of world conquest.

Paul V. Harrison



## The Matchless Christ

The French mathematician Auguste Comte was talking about religion one day with the Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle. Comte suggested they start a new religion to replace Christianity, based on positive thinking and mathematical principles. Carlyle thought about it a moment and replied, "Very good, Mr. Comte, very good. All you will need to do will be to speak as never a man spake, and live as never a man lived, and be crucified, and rise again the third day, and get the world to believe that you are still alive. Then your religion will have a chance to get on."

In surveying the evidence for the reliability of Christianity, we can look at the person of Christ himself, about whom A. T. Pierson said, "He stands absolutely alone in history; in teaching, in example, in character, an exception, a marvel, and He is Himself the evidence of Christianity. He authenticates Himself."

Christ alone, in his history and in his character, serves as a material witness in his own behalf. Anyone who wants to discredit Christianity must somehow explain away the uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth.

### DID CHRIST REALLY EXIST?

Early in the nineteenth century it became fashionable in some circles to explain away the uniqueness of Christ by questioning his very existence in history. In Germany some of the higher critics openly doubted the historicity of Christ, suggesting that the stories about him were myths like those of the Greek and Roman gods, or perhaps shadowy legends like those about King Arthur and Camelot.

Today no reputable historian tries to disavow the existence of Christ, because the evidence is irrefutable. The epistles can be dated back to the first century, the Gospels can be dated very early, the existence of the church can be traced to the years immediately following the resurrection. On top of that we have many references to Christ in the second to fourth centuries from church fathers like Polycarp, Eusebius, Irenaeus, Ignatius, etc. There are also references to Christ from ancient secular historians including Tacitus, Suetonius, Josephus, and Thallus. In addition, we find allusions to Christ among the writings of officials of the ancient Roman government such as Pliny the Younger and the Emperor Trajan.

In fact, we know more details about the life of Jesus Christ than about any other single figure in all of antiquity. The respected historian Will Durant, author of the massive eleven-volume *Story of Civilization*, devoted an entire volume of 751 pages to the years surrounding the life of Christ, entitled "Caesar and Christ." In it he wrote about the differences of style between the four Gospels, but he concluded:

In essentials the synoptic gospels agree remarkably well, and form a consistent portrait of Christ. No one reading these scenes can doubt the reality of the figure behind them. That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels. After two centuries of Higher Criticism the outlines of the life, character and teachings of Christ remain reasonably clear, and constitute the most fascinating feature in the history of Western man.

Simply put, Jesus is absolutely unequalled in history, and I would like to devote the remainder of this message to five areas in which Christ towers alone, unmatched, superlative, and far beyond any other man or woman since the beginning of the human race.

#### MATCHLESS IN HIS MAGNETISM

First, he is matchless in his magnetism. In John 12:32 Jesus said, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." The media today are always on the prowl for people brimming with personal magnetism. They glamorize those who carry themselves with a charismatic grace and charm and power of personality. Franklin Roosevelt had it, and so did John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan.

I once heard a reporter describe her impression of Reagan as he arrived in Washington, having been just elected President of the United States. She admitted she disliked Reagan's policies and philosophy, but she said that when she saw him emerge from the airplane, tall and handsome and self-assured, dressed in a dark overcoat with a white scarf around his neck, when she saw his thick, dark hair catching the snowflakes, and when she watched him bounce confidently down the steps, she was mesmerized. "There was an irresistible power to his presence," she said. "It drew you in. It was like an electric force."

It helps, if you're an actor, an actress, or a politician, to broadcast this kind of charisma. A few people in every generation have it, but only one person has ever radiated a magnetic field so powerful that it transcends

centuries and millennia. Only one man has magnetized the world to such an extent that we recognize his centrality in history every time we date a letter or mark a calendar. Only one person has exercised supreme influence over every ensuing generation, touching both peasants and potentates, both rich and poor, both young and old, both men and women. Only one person has given comfort to the living and hope to the dying. Only one person, like a bipolar magnet, has attracted so many and at the same time and with equal force repelled so many. Philip Schaff put it very well when he wrote:

This Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Muhammad, and Napoleon; without science and learning, He shed more light on matters human and divine than all the philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, He spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, He set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussion, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times.

#### MATCHLESS IN HIS TEACHING

Christ is also matchless in his teaching. When he stepped from the carpentry shop at age thirty and began addressing the Galilean multitudes with his Sermon on the Mount, they were "amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:28-29). A. T. Pierson observed that Christ taught the Scriptures to the people as if he were its author rather than its commentator. How incredible, Pierson said, that he "comes forth from the carpenter's shop, where like all other well-trained Hebrew youth, he had learned his father's trade, and his first public utterance is the most original and revolutionary address on practical morals which the world has ever heard."

Matthew 13:54-56 records that in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth the people were astounded at his teaching and asked, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? . . . Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" Mark 11:18 tells us that when the chief priests and the teachers of the law heard him they began "looking for a

way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.”

Even the military was challenged. When the chief priests sent the temple soldiers to arrest Christ, they came back empty-handed. The Pharisees, furious, asked, “Why didn’t you bring him in?” The guards had a simple reply: “No one ever spoke the way this man does” (John 7:46).

And the remarkable thing about Jesus’ teaching was the cohesive way in which he pulled together all spiritual truth into the reality of the gospel. He taught that he himself was the centerpiece of Scripture, the centerpiece of history, and the centerpiece in the plan of God for redeeming the human race. “For God so loved the world,” he told Nicodemus, “that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

#### MATCHLESS IN HIS CLAIMS

Closely related is a third area of uniqueness about Christ. He is unequalled in the claims he made for himself, for he claimed to be both God and man, with both natures being assimilated perfectly in one personality. It is interesting to remember that the only charge of which they could convict Jesus, the only thing that stuck and led to his condemnation and execution, was his claim to be God. Yet at the same time his favorite title for himself was “Son of Man.” John Chrysostom said in the fourth century:

I do not think of Christ as God alone, or man alone, but both together. For I know He was hungry, and I know that with five loaves He fed five thousand. I know He was thirsty, and I know that He turned the water into wine. I know He was carried in a ship, and I know that He walked on the sea. I know that He died, and I know that He raised the dead. I know that He was set before Pilate, and I know that He sits with the Father on His throne. I know that He was worshipped by angels, and I know that He was stoned by the Jews. And truly some of these I ascribe to the human, and others to the divine nature. For by reason of this He is said to have been both God and man.

This is vital to us theologically, for according to the Scriptures Christ had to be God in order to save us. In Isaiah 43:11 the Lord said, “I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior.” Yet he also had to be human. Our salvation could only have been purchased by the death of

an absolutely sinless and spotless sacrifice, for the Bible also says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). In other words, Christ had to be God in order to be pure and perfect and powerful enough to save us, and he had to be human in order to die for us. And so a baby was conceived in a virgin's womb by the Holy Spirit, and he was named Jesus, for he came to save us from our sins.

#### MATCHLESS IN HIS RESURRECTION

No other leader of any other religion ever authenticated his message by rising from the dead. And no other leader of any other religion ever proved himself alive by "many infallible proofs." Consider the fact that Jesus staked his entire reputation, ministry, and impact on the proposition that he would rise again. Christ predicted at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of his ministry that he would rise from the dead. "Destroy this temple," he said, referring to his body, "and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19). "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish," he asserted, "so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men," he said. "They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life" (Matthew 17:22-23).

In making these predictions, he was staking the future of the gospel itself on his ability to return to life following his execution. And in fulfilling the predictions, he was authenticating his message and proving himself with power to be the Son of God. No other figure in history has ever made such claims, and no one else has ever risen from the dead. None but Christ.

#### MATCHLESS IN HIS IMPACT ON HISTORY

Last of all, Jesus is matchless in human history. An unknown author once summed it up with these well-worn words:

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a house. He never went to college. He never traveled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself. He was only 33 when the tide of public

opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race, and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man on earth as has that One Solitary Life.

Lew Wallace was a famous general and literary genius of the nineteenth century who, along with his friend Robert Ingersoll, decided to write a book that would forever destroy what they called "the myth of Christianity." For two years Wallace studied in the libraries of Europe and America, and then he started writing his book. But while writing the second chapter, he found himself on his knees crying out to Jesus Christ in the words of Thomas, "My Lord and my God." And the book he was writing became the great novel about the times of Christ, *Ben Hur*.

Bill Murray was a businessman who grew up in a home that had rejected God so completely that his mother once told him, "I don't care if you become a drug addict or a bank robber or if you bring home a boyfriend instead of a girlfriend. There's just one thing I don't want you to do in life—become a Christian." So Bill grew up sexually promiscuous, moving from one marriage to another, from one sexual partner to another. He began drinking and drugging and wanting more and more possessions. He worked himself to the point of exhaustion. He collapsed inwardly and found himself praying to the God he had rejected, "Please, get me out of this mess!" Going to an all-night bookstore, he found a Bible buried under a stack of pornographic magazines, and he began reading about Jesus Christ. He was especially drawn to Luke's Gospel, and as he read it he grew convinced that Jesus was unique in history, matchless in his magnetism, his teachings, his claims, his resurrection, and his impact on history.

Bill received Christ as his Savior, and it changed his life. He gave up his drinking and drugging and promiscuous sex and rampant materialism, and he found the inner peace and joy he had always been looking for. Bill Murray, you may be interested to know, is the oldest son of atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair, who used him as the plaintiff in the Supreme Court case that outlawed prayer in the public classrooms of America.

C. S. Lewis, likewise, came to Christ almost against his will, being convinced by the evidence that Christianity was true. One of the factors was

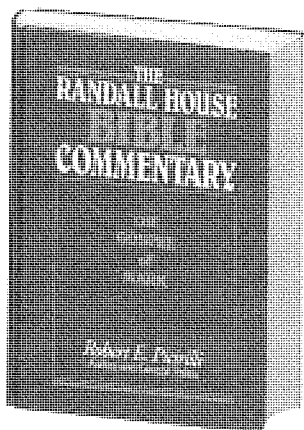


the simple process of deduction. He said he realized it was impossible to call Jesus a great moral teacher but not God. Lewis explained:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic, or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

There are only three logical options. Either he was a liar, a hoax, a deceiver, an imposter—in which case you have to explain how he could also have been the greatest spiritual leader and the most selfless, atoning sacrifice the world has ever known; or he was a lunatic—in which case you have to explain how he could have been the wisest teacher the world has ever seen; or he is the God-Man—which is just who he claimed to be. Liar, lunatic, or Lord. The answer, it seems, is obvious.

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#### Authors:

Rev. Robert E. Picirilli, B.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Rev. Jack Stallings, B.A., M.Div.

Rev. Stanley Outlaw, B.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Rev. Daryl Ellis, B.A., M.Div.

Rev. Thomas L. Marberry, B.A., M.Div., Ph.D.

Rev. Paul V. Harrison, B.A., M.A., M.Div., Th.D.

Rev. F. Leroy Forlines, B.A., M.A., B.D., Th.M.

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Com•mon (kom men) adj. 1 ordinary; regular; average

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# Expository Preaching: In Need of Redemption?

Preaching. What a tremendous and humbling privilege to be called of God to preach his glorious gospel! But what exactly is preaching? After all, when the man of God receives assurance of his calling to the ministry, the Lord does not give him a manual entitled, "How Effectively to Preach a Sermon." If such a guide were provided, what would the instructions say? What *kind* of sermon would the Lord prefer his spokesmen preach? I am personally convinced that *expository preaching* is that form of preaching which brings the most glory to Christ, most effectively communicates God's truth, and best maintains loyalty to and honesty with the Scriptures themselves. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to answer the question, "What is an expository sermon?" Because of the extensive and voluminous nature of addressing such an inquiry, this article is of necessity an overview of the subject of expository preaching—a subject every preacher of the gospel should thoroughly investigate.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE AND STATUS OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Before answering that question, however, let me reflect on what I perceive to be the status of expository preaching. My observations stem primarily from attending conferences and associational meetings where my fellow preachers are given the opportunity to preach. Based on the majority of the sermons I have heard, and based on the response of those listening to those sermons, expository preaching is not understood and rarely put into practice. More often than not, passages of Scripture are ripped out of context, twisted to mean something that was never intended, spiritualized, or all of the above.

Just recently I heard a pastor preach from 1 Kings 18 and Elijah's battle against the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Instead of preaching the message as an historical, miraculous event, and drawing relevant principles from the passage, he spiritualized the text. For example, the altar of the Lord that was broken (18:30) represented altars that are "broken" in our churches today. The fire of the Lord that fell and consumed the sacrifice (18:38) represented the fire of revival that needs to return to our

churches, ministries, and individual lives. My excitement after turning to the text and realizing the subject of the passage so quickly faded when my brother proceeded to do disservice to God's Word.

Out of genuine curiosity I frequently ask my preacher friends what they are preaching on Sundays or Wednesdays. It is on a very rare occasion that one of them says something like, "I'm preaching a series of messages through the Gospel of John" or "I'm currently preaching through Christ's Sermon on the Mount." Most of the time, there's no indication of any preaching plan at all. What does that mean? I am not sure, but my suspicion is that they probably are preaching topical rather than expository messages. I agree with Bryan Chapell: "The time has come for redeeming the expository sermon—not only reclaiming its needed voice of authority, but also rescuing expository methods from practitioners unaware (or uncaring) of cultural forces, communication requirements, and biblical instruction that will make it an effective vehicle for the gospel."<sup>1</sup>

#### EXPOSITORY PREACHING DEFINED

What authority does any preacher have for preaching a message he claims is from the Lord? Is it not the Bible, which God authored through his Spirit? Haddon Robinson certainly thinks so. He says that "when a preacher fails to preach the Scriptures, he abandons his authority."<sup>2</sup> If God has revealed himself through his Word, should not our preaching find its source directly from that Word? To preach anything but the Scriptures is to preach somebody else's message. That is why John R. W. Stott boldly proclaims, "It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching."<sup>3</sup> In agreement, Sidney Greidanus writes, "Expository preaching is 'Bible-centered preaching.'"<sup>4</sup> However, he quickly clarifies his position by adding that *expository preaching* is "more than a mere synonym for biblical preaching; it describes what is involved in biblical preaching, namely, the exposition of a biblical passage (or passages)."<sup>5</sup>

1. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 11-12.

2. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 18.

3. John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 125.

4. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 11.

5. *Ibid.*

In his excellent volume on the preparation and delivery of expository sermons, Jerry Vines details the various and traditional sermon models and then makes his preference for expository preaching crystal clear. I totally agree with his summation: "The best preaching you can do is to go through books of the Bible—chapter by chapter and paragraph by paragraph—in a systematic fashion. Such an approach will ensure the keenest interpretation and the best use of context."<sup>6</sup>

Expository preaching is rooted and grounded in the text of Scripture. "To expound Scripture," Stott continues, "is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. . . . The opposite of exposition is 'imposition,' which is to impose on the text what is not there."<sup>7</sup> And that is wrong! Who does that preacher think he is who claims to have thoughts above God's thoughts? Richard Mayhue correctly states, "Exposition presupposes an exegetical process to extract the God-intended meaning of Scripture and an explanation of that meaning in a contemporary way."<sup>8</sup> Acknowledging the difficulty of defining something that involves "God, the preacher and the congregation," Robinson offers this working definition of expository preaching:

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.<sup>9</sup>

Two other excellent definitions warrant our attention:

*Faris Whitesell*: An expository sermon is based on a Bible passage, usually longer than a verse or two; the theme, the thesis and the major and minor divisions coming from the passage; the whole sermon being an honest attempt to unfold the true grammatical-historical-contextual meaning of the passage, making it relevant to life today by proper organization, argument, illustrations, application, and appeal.<sup>10</sup>

*Stephen Olford*: Expository preaching is the Spirit-empowered explanation and proclamation of God's Word with due regard

6. Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 32.

7. Stott, 125-26.

8. Richard Mayhue, "Rediscovering Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. Richard Mayhue (Dallas: Word, 1992), 3.

9. Robinson, 20.

10. Faris D. Whitesell, *Power in Expository Preaching* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1967), vi-vii.

Having presented the problem, Stott proceeds to present five theological foundations (convictions) that leave the preacher without excuse for not preaching the Bible.<sup>17</sup> The first is a *conviction about God*. Since God is light (1 John 1:5), he chooses not to be secretive. Rather, he desires to be known. Since God has acted in history, particularly in creation and redemption, he has indeed made himself known to man. And since God has spoken (through historical deeds and explanatory words), the preacher must speak the truth of those words as well.

The second is a *conviction about Scripture*. The Bible is God's written Word, divinely inspired and preserved for his people through the ages. It is through that same Word that God continues to speak. Hebrews 3:7, where the author quotes from Psalm 95:7 with the introduction "as the Holy Spirit says," clearly implies that the Holy Spirit makes the same appeal to his people to listen today as he did centuries prior. Not only does God's Word continue to speak today, but it does so with almighty power, always accomplishing its purpose (Isaiah 55:11). A plethora of similes are used to illustrate the powerful influence of the Word; for example, a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12), a fire and a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29), a lamp (Psalm 119:105), and a mirror (James 1:22-25).

Thirdly, the preacher needs a *conviction about the church*, specifically the fact that the church is God's creation by his Word. Stott elaborates by saying the following: "Not only has he brought it into being by his Word, but he maintains and sustains it, directs and sanctifies it, reforms and renews it through the same Word. The Word of God is the scepter by which Christ rules the Church and the food with which he nourishes it."<sup>18</sup> What tragic results are encountered then when the preacher does not preach the Bible!

A fourth theological foundation for expository preaching is a *conviction about the pastorate*. The pastor is to "shepherd the flock of God" (1 Peter 5:2), which obviously involves teaching and preaching the Word. Paul sent Timothy to provide pastoral oversight at the church of Ephesus. He later instructed him to "give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation [preaching] and teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13). The apostles committed themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4). Should not these same priorities exist in the life and ministry of pastors today?

17. The five "theological foundations" that follow are taken from Stott, 93-133.

18. *Ibid.*, 109. Stott(110) adds that "it is not difficult to demonstrate the dependence of the people of God on the Word of God. For throughout Scripture God is addressing his people, teaching them his way, and appealing to them both for his sake and for theirs to hear and heed his message." Cf. Exodus 19:3-6; Deuteronomy 6:1-3; Proverbs 8:1-36; Jeremiah 7:23-26; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; and 2 Thessalonians 3.

Finally, a preacher must have a *conviction about preaching*, but not just any preaching. It must be *exposition of the Scriptures!* Such exposition will set necessary limits to the scriptural text. Stott reminds preachers “that we are guardians of a sacred ‘deposit’ of truth, ‘trustees’ of the gospel, ‘stewards’ of the mysteries of God.”<sup>19</sup> Such exposition also demands our integrity as we render careful exegesis of the text, letting the Bible mean what it means. Careful exposition of a biblical text helps prevent the preacher from venturing off on some tangent and helps him maintain loyalty to its intended meaning. What a tragedy for any preacher to make the following statement as part of the introduction to his sermon: “That is my text. I am now going to preach. Maybe we’ll meet again, my text and I, and maybe not.”<sup>20</sup>

#### PRACTICAL JUSTIFICATIONS FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Not only are there biblical and theological justifications for expository preaching, but there are also several practical reasons as well, especially if the man of God preaches expository sermons through books of the Bible. Such preaching will provide the preacher with the authority he needs to proclaim the truth. Faithful exposition of the Scriptures allows the preacher to “let the chips fall where they may” and the people know it is of the Lord. Greidanus emphasizes this point when he says,

... the sermon should be much more than “one man’s opinion”; the sermon should be the word of God. The history of preaching shows that nontextual, topical preaching all too easily derails into the quagmire of personal opinions. But a preaching-text provides the basis for keeping a sermon on track so that textual preaching [that is, expository preaching] is indeed the word of God.<sup>21</sup>

Preaching expository messages through a biblical book is a tremendous time-saver because the pastor knows where he is going next. He simply preaches the next verse, paragraph or section and does not have

19. *Ibid.*, 126. See 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; and 1 Corinthians 4:1-2.

20. *Ibid.*, 130. Stott takes this quotation from G. Campbell Morgan’s *Preaching* (New York: Revell, 1937), 42, who also disdained the statement.

21. Greidanus, 123.

to spend precious time searching for a text.<sup>22</sup> Controversial issues are best handled this way. The preacher deals with them as they arise in the text as opposed to preaching on a topic "out of the blue."

Expository preaching provides the greatest benefit for God's people. They can develop a better grasp and understanding of the Word. They can test the content of the preaching according to the passage at hand. Again, Greidanus agrees when he writes:

. . . expository preaching causes the *Scriptures* to be heard in church, thus enabling the members to gain an understanding of the *Scriptures* . . . [it] gives the hearers a measure of assurance that they are hearing the word of God . . . [it] aids the critical functioning of the church since it provides the hearers with textual limits for testing the spoken word against the written word; thus the hearers can decide more responsibly whether a message deserves acceptance.<sup>23</sup>

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out another practical benefit to expository preaching when he states that "it will preserve and guarantee variety and variation in your preaching. It will save you from repetition; and that will be a good thing for your people as well as for yourself."<sup>24</sup>

I agree with Mayhue when he says, "Expository preaching best emulates biblical preaching both in content and style. This is the chief benefit."<sup>25</sup> He then proceeds to list fifteen other advantages, which include the following: "Expository preaching provides a storehouse of preaching material . . . develops the pastor as a man of God's Word . . . leads to thinking and living biblically . . . encourages both depth and comprehensiveness . . . keeps the preacher away from ruts and hobby horses . . . prevents the insertion of human ideas."<sup>26</sup>

22. W. A. Criswell gives powerful testimony to this by saying, "As I look at preachers preparing their sermons, I often think of their pacing up and down the study floor, wondering what they shall preach about the following Sunday. I also pace up and down. . . . But I have an altogether different reason and purpose for my walking up and down the floor. I walk up and down the floor in an agony of spirit being afraid that I shall not have time in the span of my ministry to preach all that I want to preach and to deliver all that I want to deliver and to share all that I have seen in God's blessed Word." See W. A. Criswell, *Why I Preach That the Bible Is Literally True* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 124.

23. Greidanus, 16.

24. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 75.

25. Mayhue, 20.

26. *Ibid.*



## ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF AN EXPOSITORY SERMON

So what exactly does an expository sermon look like? What are its essential components? Perhaps the most distinguishing component is the *text* because it serves as the foundation for the entire sermon. With regard to the sermon text, Stott waxes eloquent by saying,

... the “text” in question could be a verse, or a sentence, or even a single word. It could equally be a paragraph, or a chapter, or a whole book. The size of the text is immaterial, so long as it is biblical. What matters is what we do with it. Whether it is long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction or falsification. In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thought, but a master which dictates and controls what is said.<sup>27</sup>

“The point is,” adds Greidanus, “that in all instances the selected preaching-text must be a complete unit, whether it is a sentence, a paragraph, or several paragraphs.”<sup>28</sup>

As Stott pointed out above, once the text is chosen, it is vitally important that we treat the text appropriately through careful and thorough *exegesis*. Lloyd-Jones gives an excellent word of wisdom here: “At this point there is one golden rule, one absolute demand—honesty. You have got to be honest with your text.”<sup>29</sup> John Piper is passionate about his belief that preaching must be grounded in the text:

All Christian preaching should be the exposition and application of biblical texts. Our authority as preachers sent by God rises and falls with our manifest allegiance to the text of Scripture. I say “manifest” because there are so many preachers who say their assertions explicitly—“manifestly”—in the text. They don’t show their people clearly that the assertions of their preaching are coming from specific, readable words of Scripture that the people can see for themselves.<sup>30</sup>

27. Stott, 126.

28. Greidanus, 127.

29. Lloyd-Jones, 199.

30. John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 41.

This careful and honest exegesis of the text is where too many preachers become lazy and are unwilling to invest the hours, the "spiritual sweat" and tears, and the prayers necessary to arrive at the meaning of the text. As important as exegesis is, the expositor can not stop there. He must uncover the *dominant theme* of the passage. Stott comments that "one of the chief ways in which a sermon differs from a lecture is that it aims to convey one major message."<sup>31</sup> And perhaps no one has better expressed this need to discern the theme of the text than J. H. Jowett who said,

I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching . . . until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting and the most fruitful labor in my study. . . . I do not think any sermon ought to be preached, or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon.<sup>32</sup>

Almost simultaneous with the discovery of the dominant theme of the passage is the process of drawing out principles from the text. Mayhue states: "Unless the centuries can be bridged with contemporary relevance in the message, then the preaching experience differs little from a classroom encounter. One must first process the text for original meaning and then principlize the text for current applicability."<sup>33</sup> Once the dominant theme has been determined and relevant principles have been exegeted, the expositor must arrange his material so as to serve and make clear the theme of the sermon. This is almost always done in the form of an *outline* whereby the sermonic material (the body of the sermon) is properly arranged. In developing this "organizational structure," John Broadus stresses the necessity that it produce clarity of thought: "The preacher must strive to render it not merely possible that the people should understand but impossible that they should misunderstand."<sup>34</sup>

John MacArthur is helpful with his comments about a sermon outline:

Outline points are hooks to hang thoughts on. They are lights along the pathway to enable listeners to stay on the path. They

31. Stott, 225.

32. Quoted in Stott, 226.

33. Mayhue, 16.

34. John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 80.

help retain listener attention and facilitate comprehension. An imbalanced, confusing, or complicated outline is self-defeating. Outline points must be parallel in structure, i.e., all built around the same part of speech, such as all nouns, all verbs, or all adjectives. They should all be either questions or declarative statements.<sup>35</sup>

Wayne McDill refers to this arrangement of sermonic material as the “sermon design.” He contends that sermons with proper design connect with the audience both functionally (accomplishing the intended purpose of the sermon) and aesthetically (possessing a sense of beauty). He then issues this sobering reminder:

No matter how good it may look to the preacher, sermon design will ultimately be judged by the audience. Poor design receives its still and silent assessment—boredom, indifference, resentment, even embarrassment. No matter how sincere and earnest the preacher is about his message, poor design will cripple his presentation.<sup>36</sup>

Another vital component of expository preaching is what Stott calls “bridge-building,”<sup>37</sup> or the communicating of a relevant message that “spans” the chasm between the biblical world and the modern world. In other words, this bridge-building process is where *application* is made to the lives of our listeners, application that is vitally connected to the truth of the text. Application or bridge-building involves asking and answering questions that men and women of all ages have asked.<sup>38</sup> It points out what is right and wrong in our personal lives. It deals with responsibilities in the home (whether a child, parent, or spouse) as well as responsibilities in society. Stott further states that the application of expository preaching “should gradually unfold ‘the whole counsel of God’ and so contribute to the development of Christian minds [i.e., a Christian worldview] in the congregation.”<sup>39</sup> Expository preaching, then, reaching into

35. John MacArthur, “Moving from Exegesis to Exposition,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 295.

36. Wayne McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 158.

37. Stott, 137-38.

38. *Ibid.*, 151. Stott gives several such questions, including the following: What is the purpose of our existence? Where did I come from and where am I going to? Is there a way to be rid of guilt and of a guilty conscience? What hope can sustain us in the midst of our despair?

39. *Ibid.*, 170-71.

the hearts of the congregation, makes pertinent application for the bank teller, the farmer, the CEO, the teacher, the student—everyone. “Sound application,” says Chapell, “ventures out of hypothetical abstraction and elbows its way into business practices, family life, social relationships, societal attitudes, personal habits, and spiritual priorities.”<sup>40</sup>

Chapell urges preachers to be balanced in their preaching, making sure every sermon contains elements of explanation, illustration, and application. In conjunction with these sermonic components, he states that “it is often helpful to think that explanations prepare the mind, illustrations prepare the heart, and applications prepare the will to obey God.”<sup>41</sup>

Only after the exegetical study, the discovery of the dominant theme and timeless principles, the development of an organizational structure, and bridge-building through application have been accomplished, is the expositional sermon ready for two other vital components: the *introduction* and *conclusion*. Regarding the introduction, Broadus agrees that it “should be composed after the body of the discourse is fully perceived. The preacher must know the body to be introduced before he can do it properly.”<sup>42</sup>

Speaking to the benefits of a quality introduction, Stott says,

A good introduction serves two purposes. First, it arouses interest, stimulates curiosity, and whets the appetite for more. Secondly, it genuinely “introduces” the theme by leading the hearers to it. . . . The right but hard way is to introduce the topic and arouse interest simultaneously, and so dispose people’s minds and hearts towards our message.<sup>43</sup>

So many vitally important issues hinge on a quality introduction: an initial evaluation of the preacher’s credibility, the potential capturing of the people’s interest, and even the sermon’s potential success! Therefore, the opening words of any and every sermon must be well prepared.<sup>44</sup>

The conclusion of the sermon may be the most neglected part of an expository message. “However,” argues Mayhue, “just as an athlete needs to finish strong at the end of a race or game, the preacher must be at his best in the closing minutes.”<sup>45</sup> In agreement with Mayhue, Robinson

40. Chapell, 217.

41. *Ibid.*, 87.

42. Broadus, 107.

43. Stott, 244.

44. Robinson, 166-67.

45. Mayhue, 252.

says, "As an experienced pilot knows that landing an airplane demands special concentration, so an able preacher understands that conclusions require thoughtful preparation. Like the pilot a skilled preacher should never have uncertainty about where his sermon will land."<sup>46</sup> The conclusion should go beyond a mere summary of the message to a final appeal that is made through personal application. James 1:22 teaches that we are to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers." Therefore, the conclusion provides the preacher his final opportunity to persuade his listeners to respond and obey the truth of the text. That is why, Stott contends, "our expectation, then, as the sermon comes to an end, is not merely that people will understand or remember or enjoy our teaching, but that they will do something about it."<sup>47</sup>

Emotional conclusions to sermons are not without controversy and differences of opinion. Chapell seems to have struck an appropriate and wise balance:

Manipulation of emotions with a story that does not drive home the principles that have been developed in the message ranks among the worst abuses of preaching. But, failing to engage the heart, stimulate the will, excite the mind, and elevate the soul concerning eternal truths at this most crucial state is nearly as great a crime. Preachers who ethically use a human-interest account to elicit honest emotions, stir genuine feelings, and provoke appropriate convictions are following biblical injunctions to urge, persuade, and encourage. Conclusions should neither contrive emotions nor avoid them.<sup>48</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

It is my earnest belief that expository preaching, as concisely laid out in this article, is the very best way to preach God's Word. Why not give it a try? Prayerfully seek God's face about which biblical book or section of a book he would have you preach through (after all, can he not give guidance for a whole series of messages as easily as one sermon at a time?). If you have never preached through a book of the Bible, you may want to begin with a shorter book, perhaps James or 1 John, or maybe preach through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. It requires tremendous discipline and a considerable amount of time, but you may want to study the book or section and map out what expository units or

46. Robinson, 167.

47. Stott, 246.

48. Chapell, 248.

paragraphs will be preached for the next several weeks or months. Then, trust God as you diligently prepare each sermon and enjoy the wonderful benefits of expository preaching: knowing exactly what text you will be preaching next week, seeing God's sovereignty at work as he deals with current and relevant issues while you systematically preach through the upcoming passages, watching your people grow in their comprehension of the Scriptures, and knowing you are preaching with God's authority because you are "rightly dividing the Word of truth!"<sup>49</sup>

49. For further reading and assistance in developing the skill of effective expository preaching I recommend the following: *Between Two Worlds* by John R. W. Stott; *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* by Haddon Robinson; *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Bryan Chapell; *Power in the Pulpit* by Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix; *Toward an Exegetical Theology* by Walter Kaiser; and *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* by Wayne McDill.

# The Old Testament As the Christian's Book

## INTRODUCTION: "BUT THAT'S THE OLD BIBLE"

"You'll enjoy this class because the discussion is always lively," the pastor explained as he directed me to a particular Sunday school class that morning. The topic was bodily resurrection, focusing on 1 Corinthians 15 as a text. After a few minutes of rambling commentary by the leader, various members began to offer their insights on the subject. The pastor was right about one thing: this class felt at home freely exchanging opinions even though much of the discussion was eccentric and irrelevant to the text. Just when my interest was flagging, one member's question and another's response to it reclaimed my attention. "Doesn't Job say something about having a new body after he dies and seeing God from his flesh in the last days?" the man inquired. I felt sure that this abbreviated paraphrase of Job 19:25-27 would inject new life into the proceedings, especially since no comment thus far had ventured onto Old Testament turf. My hopes faded, however, when another class member retorted, "But that's the *old* Bible," and went on to insist that this antiquated collection of Hebrew folklore had nothing to say to us about what was exclusively a New Testament subject. If anything, she assured us, this "old Bible" would only create more confusion. I offered a rather mild rejoinder to the contrary but in my position as a guest decided to forego a more vigorous apologetic in defense of the "old Bible." With that exchange, the class ended. In the years since this incident, I have regretted my abdication that Sunday.

The opinion expressed in that Sunday school class reflects a widespread devaluation of the Old Testament in today's church. At times this bias is subtle, only hinted at, though often it is up front and blatant. These attitudes are representative of the tendency to slight or to avoid altogether that portion of the Bible which precedes Matthew: "Can't we just use the New Testament in the church?" "I'll be so glad when we get back to the New Testament in our Bible study curriculum." "Sure the Old Testament is important, but only because it prepares us for the New." Tragically, many in the church of the twenty-first century follow Emerson's counsel in his essay, "Self-Reliance": "If therefore a man claims to know and speak of God, and carries you backward to the phraseology

of some old moldered nation in another country, in another world, believe him not."<sup>1</sup>

My own educational experience mirrors this all-too-common neglect of the Old Testament. Despite graduating from a Bible college with an undergraduate major in Bible, I lacked a coherent view of how the first thirty-nine books of the Bible contributed to its overall message. Not only was my knowledge fragmented, it was also limited in scope. When I began taking Old Testament classes in graduate school, I saw what I had missed. New vistas in Scripture opened to me; people, stories, and lessons which I had avoided became real as God's Word spoke to me in tones my ears had never heard. More than two decades of ministry in the pastorate and in the classroom, both graduate and undergraduate, have convinced me that a large percentage of believers share an uneasy mindset when walking on pre-Matthean ground. Too many Christians are not at home in the world of Jacob, Deborah, Elihu, and Habakkuk.

Our problem is not that we reject the Old Testament altogether. The second-century heretic Marcion took such an approach, wanting to slice everything from Genesis to Malachi out of the canon.<sup>2</sup> No one who takes the Bible seriously would condone this extremism. What we are guilty of, however, is reducing the Old Testament's force in the life of the church. Its teaching thus becomes pertinent only for quaint moral examples and illustrative stories; in effect, it lacks the authoritative value of New Testament truth—a reduction not formally stated by creed but practically effected by neglect and ignorance. As a result, believers living in a hostile postmodern society struggle both to find and to apply truth from more than three quarters of their confessed holy book. With good reason, therefore, Walter Kaiser labels the Old Testament question "*the* Christian problem."<sup>3</sup> John Bright rightly asks,

How are these ancient laws, institutions, and concepts, these ancient narratives, sayings, and expressions of an ancient piety,

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Basic Selections from Emerson*, ed. Eduard C. Lindeman (New York: Mentor, 1954), 62.

2. Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*, trans. John E. Steely and Lyle D. Bierma (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth, 1990), 25-51. See also Tertullian's defense of the relationship between the Testaments against Marcion's attacks. *The Five Books against Marcion*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 3:297-320.

3. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 13-32 (italics added). For an earlier treatment of these issues from a slightly different perspective, see James Orr, *The Problem of the Old Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 2-24.



actually to be taken as authoritative over the faith and life of the Christian, and how proclaimed as such in the church?<sup>4</sup>

The person who believes in Jesus Christ in an age of PCs, VCRs, and CDs, of brokers, bytes, and billion dollar budgets, thus confronts an enormous challenge: to understand the message of the Old Testament and, having understood, to appropriate it in the vital process of spiritual formation.

#### COMPLICATING FACTORS

Contributing to the larger Old Testament problem are at least five obstacles which the interpreter must tackle: its unique cultural setting, its seemingly dated material, the volume of its content, the lengthy time span it covers, and its wide range of literary types.<sup>5</sup>

(1) The first difficulty involves *cultural setting*. The world of the Old Testament is the world of the ancient Near East—a fascinating stage on which God's drama unfolds, yet one alien to a reader who lives centuries removed in an industrialized, transnational, knowledge-based society. When we engage the patriarchal narratives or sift through biblical accounts of Judah's monarchial reforms, we necessarily step back into a culture where slavery was the norm, Semitic languages formed the basis for communication, and men were considered superior to women in most respects. For instance, wives in Old Testament cultures looked to their husbands as their *ba'al*, their "owner" or "master." Further, marriages often were arranged among one's own kin by parents when the prospective partners were only children. For another example, consider the thirteenth-century-B.C. practice of exchanging sandals in order to legalize a business transaction.<sup>6</sup> In today's world these kinds of deals are signed and notarized, often with a confirmatory handshake, but not with a transfer of wing tips or Italian loafers. Others occur on-line, no handshake needed. Many customs in the realms of Old Testament politics, society, economics, and religion typify the enormous gulf between ancient Near Eastern times and our own.

4. John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 18.

5. Tremper Longman III offers a helpful overview of problems facing the Old Testament interpreter. *Making Sense of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 17-22.

6. Ruth 4:7-10 describes this custom. For more background on the setting for the "loosened sandal" practice and its Mishnaic connections, see Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 1:22, 169; Ze'ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times: An Introduction* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 155; and John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 280.

(2) Because of its primary setting in the two millennia before the Christian era in these unfamiliar cultural surroundings, the Old Testament includes *material that seems dated* to us. "Muzzling" an ox (Deuteronomy 25:4) or wearing clothes made of mixed fabric (Deuteronomy 22:11), for instance, are not pressing issues for most people in today's world. Many Christians have no clue as to the rationale behind such outdated cultural oddities; even if such precepts were a part of ancient Israelite society, surely they have nothing to do with kingdom-living today, or so we assume.

(3) Another difficulty for Christian believers in grasping the significance of the Hebrew Scriptures is the sheer *volume of material* in these thirty-nine books. Even though the writings of Isaiah and Jeremiah contain more chapters between them than the Gospels and Acts combined and comprise a significant percentage of Old Testament prophetic material, many people in the church are content to pass over these two deep, heavy books in favor of more "believer friendly" New Testament texts.

(4) Consider also the *long time span* encompassed by Old Testament history. While the New Testament era spans roughly one century, the Old covers the time from Abraham (ca. 2100 B.C.) and before, all the way to the post-exilic years, ending in the fifth century B.C. Any modern reader sensitive to relevant thinking would naturally call into question the pertinence of a book whose last chapter was written some twenty-five centuries ago.

(5) A final hurdle involves the *wide range of genres* or types of material in the Old Testament. Narrative; legal codes; poetry set within the context of prophecy, wisdom literature, and narrative; genealogies; and other subcategories are all a part of the literary mix.<sup>7</sup> All of these factors play a role in Old Testament interpretation, leaving the reader challenged to give maximum effort in making sense of these words.

#### MOVING TOWARD ANSWERS

Before attempting to put together pieces of the Old Testament puzzle, we must first identify some "red herrings." A number of supposed solutions offering little or no help to our understanding have come to the table from time to time. These include: (1) simply claiming divine

7. Several works offer help with interpreting the various types of literature in the Old Testament. See Walter Kaiser and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 67-103; Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987); Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987); and Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III, eds., *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).

inspiration; (2) denying any value to the Old Testament; (3) excusing the problem as a new one; (4) allegorizing the text; and (5) assuming the Old Testament reflects Israel's evolving religious ideas.<sup>8</sup> Confessing that these writings are inspired by God does not solve the problem, however fervently one may hold to this claim and however true it may be. If anything, confidence in the Old Testament as propositional truth from God furnishes all the more impetus to find answers to these baffling problems. The thorny spots seem even sharper when the volume before us presents itself to be a book "standing firm in the heavens" (Psalm 119:89).<sup>9</sup> As an illustration, suppose Chief Justice Rehnquist of the United States Supreme Court wrote a textbook for use by law students. A number of top lawyers review the page proofs and approach the publisher with concerns. They point to a number of apparent mistakes and contradictions in the book. Such concerns could not be allayed with a simple declaration from the publishers to the effect that, "If Chief Justice Rehnquist wrote it, it must be right." The fact that such an esteemed legal authority as the Chief Justice authored the material makes the need for solutions to the supposed problems even more necessary. If God wrote the Bible, its apparent discrepancies call for explanations.

From the opposite perspective, no help is gained if we try to deny any value to the Old Testament. Many would question the relevance of a book detailing the dimensions of a Transjordanian king's bed in the second millennium B.C. (Deuteronomy 3:11). The same book, however, in the very next chapter commends the character of a nation for whom "the LORD our God is near . . . whenever we call on him" (Deuteronomy 4:7). Even this assertion, some may say, is the exclusive domain of Israel in Moses' day, not that of today's church. Follow Deuteronomy to the next chapter, then, where God himself reissues (see Exodus 20:1-17) the most famous ten "words" in all of history. Rare is the Christian who would turn thumbs down on the Ten Commandments if a pollster inquired about their relevance to this age, no matter what the ACLU may say. The Old Testament presents such juxtapositions to its readers throughout its

8. This evolutionary scheme of Israel's religious development gained widespread appeal through the work of Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian, 1957). A more recent proponent of source analysis is Barry L. Bandstra, *Reading the Old Testament* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1995). Other contemporary critical approaches tend to downplay individual sources for Old Testament documents in favor of wider "tradition complexes." See Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986). Bright gives a summary of how interpreters through history have viewed the Old Testament in *Authority*, 58-109.

9. *Tanakh* translation; unless otherwise noted, Scripture citations are from the New American Standard Bible, Updated Edition.

pages: that which is noble and timeless set over against that which seems trivial and archaic.

It is also a mistake to excuse the issue as a modern one. Throughout the centuries of church history Christian thinkers have wrestled with the question. A few reached the misguided conclusion that the Old Testament did not belong in the canon of Scripture and summarily sought to throw it out. Other interpreters have resorted to a method of interpreting the text through allegory and heightened symbolism. If a passage seems trite or too mundane to convey spiritual truth, then the reader needs to seek hidden meaning beyond the normal principles of exposition, they suggest. For example, the third-century church father Origen saw the book of Lamentations not as a series of poetic laments over the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., but as anguished expressions of the soul's struggle with life conveyed symbolically.<sup>10</sup>

With the coming of the "historical-critical" approach to the Bible in the late nineteenth century, rationalistic critics contended that the Old Testament developed as Israel's religious views evolved.<sup>11</sup> The practical effect of this way of thinking led the critic to dismiss Israel's alleged early, "primitive" beliefs. For example, Jacob's wrestling match with the angel in Genesis 32 may reflect an old superstition in Israel's tradition about an encounter with river gods, some suggest.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly they conclude that this part of the Old Testament literature offers less value than the more "advanced" portions such as Amos's "religiously correct" words: ". . . let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (Amos 5:24).

10. See Joseph Wilson Trigg for other examples. *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983).

11. According to the nineteenth century critical reconstruction, Israel's religion moved from animism to polytheism to monolatry and, finally, to monotheism. This scenario grew out of an enlightenment mingling of Cartesian rationalism, Kantian empiricism, and Hegelian positivism. See Royce Gordon Gruenler, *Meaning and Understanding: The Philosophical Framework for Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 21-71. For a perceptive refutation of many higher critical postulates from within the critical camp, see Cyrus H. Gordon, "Higher Critics and Forbidden Fruit," *Christianity Today* (November 23, 1959), 131-34. As the twenty-first century opens, Old Testament critical interpretation, like many other fields, has entered the "fog" of pluralism and postmodernism. See Craig Bartholemew, "Reading the Old Testament in Postmodern Times," *Tyndale Bulletin* 49 (1998): 91-114.

12. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997), 347-53; and Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Sullivan (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 516-17.

## TWO FRONTS

These approaches merely lead us down dead-end paths, however. The Old Testament comes alive for the modern reader only when we begin with the premise that, as a whole and in all its components, this literature is of essential value to the Christian. Its value exists on two vital fronts. First, as Christians, we accept the New Testament as God's revelation of how he has kept promises made in the Old. Second, the Old Testament is valuable in and of itself for the Christian.

*New Testament Testimony*

We can and should read the Old Testament with the informing light provided by the New. The Old anticipates the New; the New attests the Old. In this sense, therefore, we treasure the Old Testament for its worth affirmed in its sequel. Though the Old has inherent value, it is not the whole story. Without the New Testament we have only one volume of a two-volume set. The two should be read as companion volumes.

In fact, several connectors link the testaments.<sup>13</sup> Both Old and New stress the need for heart loyalty, not just external conformity, to God. Jesus expressed amazement that Nicodemus, schooled in Judaism, knew nothing of heart renewal—the “new birth” (John 3:10). The implication is that Nicodemus should have gleaned something about this truth from his study of the Hebrew Scriptures. Deuteronomy, as well as other books, emphasizes the need for loving God with the whole person, particularly the inner man or “heart” (Deuteronomy 4:29; 5:29; 6:5; 10:12, 16; 30:2, 6, 10; Ezekiel 18:31-32). Old Testament prophets condemn the Israelites repeatedly for offering sacrifices apart from a right heart and spirit (Isaiah 1:12-16; Amos 4:4; Hosea 6:6), stressing that outward compliance with worship rituals must issue from a submissive heart (Psalm 51:16-19).

The two testaments also highlight the necessity of faith. Three main Hebrew verbs convey the idea of “believing” or “trusting.” One verb (*āman*) emphasizes belief in the person of God and in the truthfulness of his statements, both from positive (Genesis 15:6; Exodus 14:31) and negative (Numbers 20:12; 2 Kings 17:14) perspectives. The other two express “trust” in the sense of personal commitment (for *bātah*, see Psalm 40:4; Proverbs 3:5; 2 Kings 18:5; Isaiah 26:3; for *hāsah*, see Ruth 2:12; 2 Samuel 22:3). If any doubt exists as to the presence of faith in Old Testament times, just take another good look at Hebrews 11, the “hall of faith.”

13. This emphasis on the unity of the Old and New Testaments does not discount the truth that many differences also exist between the two. An excellent treatment of both viewpoints is John S. Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1988).

Other links underscore this unity. Both Old and New Testaments attest the beneficial nature of the law (Psalm 1:2; 19:7; Luke 16:27-31). Jesus announced that he had come to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17-20). That sin is by its nature primarily a matter of the heart, both the Old (Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9) and the New (James 1:14-15) affirm. Yet they also extol the grace of God (Exodus 34:6; Deuteronomy 4:32-38; Romans 5:20-21). The Old Testament emphasizes the need for compassion toward needy, hurting people as does the New. In fact, some one-third of the legislation in Deuteronomy involves humanitarian concerns (see also Leviticus 19:17-18; Proverbs 25:21). Shared themes between the testaments also include creation, the Spirit of God, the nature of man, election, covenant, sacrifice, atonement, redemption, judgment, prayer, and holiness.

An overarching theme for all of Scripture is the rule of God over his creation, particularly over his people. God's plan as revealed in the Bible is that he receive glory from a creation reconciled to himself through the work of his Christ, his Messiah, whose reign is universal. Both testaments reveal how God is implementing this plan. In the Old Testament, God chooses Israel as his people to display his rule to the world and through whom his King, Messiah, will come. Despite this attention given to Israel, however, even in the Old Testament era reconciliation with God is available to all, Gentiles included. The New Testament likewise portrays the people of God, now the church, displaying God's rule before the world as they bear witness of the Messiah, Jesus. As with the Old, New Testament revelation announces a reconciliation open to both Jews (Israel) and Gentiles.

We must not overlook this promise-fulfillment design encompassing both parts of Scripture.<sup>14</sup> The message of the Bible is one of reconciliation: God announces his intent to restore the damaged relationship between himself and his creation, particularly humans. The Old Testament is the record of this promise. With the advent of Messiah, the promise is fulfilled (Luke 24:44-47; John 5:39; Acts 17:2-3; 18:28; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

Although my intent at this point is not to detail a full-blown presentation of Old Testament messianic teaching, the person and work of Christ are primary points of focus in biblical revelation as a whole.<sup>15</sup> He

14. Walter Kaiser bases his Old Testament theology on the theme of "promise." *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

15. After a dearth in the subject for several decades, Christological interpretation of the Old Testament has received attention again recently. Among noteworthy works are Michael P. V. Barrett, *Beginning at Moses* (Greenville: Ambassador-Emerald, 1999); and Phillip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham, eds., *The Lord's Anointed* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

is the singular *Prophet* like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18), who comes not only declaring the Word of God to man but embodying that Word as well. Christ ministers as the great High *Priest*, the consummate seed of woman crushing the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15); the seed of Abraham as well, mediating God's blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:16-18); the heir to Melchizedek's office, ministering as a priest forever (Psalm 110); the Servant of the Lord suffering as a sacrifice for sin (Isaiah 52:13-53:12); the Branch who, through his death, removes iniquity (Zechariah 3:8-9); the Son of David who does not succumb to death, for he rises from the dead (Psalm 16:9-11).

The triumphant Messiah, so lowly and nondescript when he appeared on earth the first time, reigns as *King* of kings. Old Testament predictions offer an advance biographical sketch of this coming monarch. The scepter of Judah rightly belongs to him alone (Genesis 49:10); similarly, Balaam's "star" is a scepter belonging to the king who will take possession of all nations, attests Numbers 24:17. He is the Lord's Anointed One (1 Samuel 2:10), the Messiah whose reign is without rival and with righteousness (Psalms 2, 45, and 72). As King David's son, born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), he reigns forever on David's throne (2 Samuel 7:12-16), ruling in absolute authority as the "Son of Man" over an everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14; 9:24-27). Even though we look with hindsight at these promises through New Testament lens, imagine how unprepared we would be were it not for the Old Testament preview of Christ.

Elsewhere the New Testament clearly upholds the value of the Old. Peter recognizes that God reveals truth through Old Testament prophets (Acts 3:18, 21), a conclusion echoed by the writer of Hebrews (1:1). Paul's synagogue ministry at Thessalonica demonstrates from the Old Testament Scriptures that Messiah had to suffer, die, and rise (Acts 17:1-3). In writing to these same believers, Paul would later say that this message he preached was not "the word of men, but the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Matthew's Gospel is based, to a great extent, on the premise that the life of Jesus Christ "fulfills" Old Testament prophecies. Jesus himself is definite regarding the worth of God's prior word. He draws on its authority in resisting temptation (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). In the Sermon on the Mount, he announces that all the law (Old Testament) will find fulfillment (Matthew 5:7-18). Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth and is invited to deliver the exposition in the synagogue. For his text the Lord reads Isaiah 61:1-2a and announces that on this very day he is fulfilling Isaiah's words (Luke 4:14-21).

Jesus clearly understands the force of the Scriptures. In Luke 16, when the rich man in torment requested that his brothers receive

warning about the horrors of the punishment he was now experiencing, Abraham replied that "Moses and the Prophets" provide sufficient warning. "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:27-31). Jesus scolds the Jews for rejecting him in John 8. He cites Abraham, who embraced the promises of God by faith, in contrast to Abraham's descendants of his own day, who rebuff the fulfillment of those same promises (8:37, 56).

Although Paul rejoices in the fulfillment of these promises in the person of Christ, he also looks back at the Scriptures which announced them and labels them "glorious" (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9). The Old Testament is not only profitable in its capacity to convince people of their sin (Romans 7:9-12) but also in its provision of a remedy for sin: "you have known the sacred writings," Paul reminds Timothy, "which are able to give you wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." He adds that those "God-breathed" words are also of value in "training" prepared people for good work in God's kingdom (2 Timothy 3:15-16).

To sum up this first approach, the Christian accepts the authoritative testimony of the New Testament in all its teaching; the consensus of this testimony is that the Old Testament presents information without which the believer cannot understand what God is doing in the New.<sup>16</sup>

### *Inherent Worth*

While this first line of evidence for seeing value in the Old Testament appeals to the testimony of the New, the second front commends the inherent worth of the Old. These Scriptures are significant in and of themselves for two vital reasons. To begin with, the Old Testament is a self-portrait of God. Here God reveals himself: the only living God; the supreme person of the universe who is sovereign and eternal, who has created everything, who intervenes in the history of that creation, and who has recorded an accurate account of portions of that intervention in these writings. God reveals his character directly through stated assertions regarding his power (Job 38-41; Isaiah 40), holiness (Leviticus 11:44-45), and compassion (Hosea 11-14), just to note representative examples.

The names of God as given in the Old Testament also tell us what kind of God he is. *El/Elohim* (God) and *Yahweh* ("LORD" in most English versions) are his primary names. *El/Elohim* often appear in contexts

16. F. F. Bruce contends that "to approach the Old Testament in light of Christ's fulfillment of all of its parts is to approach it aright; *this* [his emphasis] is the Christian approach to the Old Testament." *The Christian Approach to the Old Testament* (London: InterVarsity, 1955), 20.



where God's might and transcendence are in view. Compound forms of *El* highlight particular characteristics of God: *El Elyon*, "God most High" (Genesis 14:18-22); *El Shaddai*, "God Almighty" (Genesis 17:1); *El Olam*, "God Everlasting" (Isaiah 40:28). God's name *Yahweh* often emphasizes his covenant relationship with his people and his close presence to act in their behalf.<sup>17</sup> Like *El*, *Yahweh* also occurs in conjunction with other words to underscore a particular trait of God. Note, for example, "Yahweh of Hosts" (1 Samuel 3:11, and especially in the prophets), "Yahweh will see/provide" (Genesis 22:14), "Yahweh (is) peace" (Judges 6:23-24), and "Yahweh our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16).

Every part of the Old Testament—even such apparently insignificant and boring matters as the genealogies, details about land boundaries, and the particulars involved in the tabernacle materials—tells us something about who God is and what he is like.

The second reason for the inherent value of the Old Testament involves what God is doing in history. Not only does he reveal himself in these Scriptures, but he also tells us of his grand design to restore the relationship that once existed between himself and his now alienated creation. Thus God speaks on the record of himself and of the world, of how he has intervened in human history to implement a plan which results in his glory and humanity's redemption.<sup>18</sup>

#### THE OLD TESTAMENT DESIGN

The Old Testament is a story. By "story" I do not mean a fictional account on the level of myth or fable in its content, nor a work limited to prose narrative in its literary form. However, to read the Old Testament is to follow a plot with movement from beginning to end, the "end" in this case being another beginning—that of the New Testament.<sup>19</sup> Within this larger story line are woven smaller stories. For example, consider the

17. On the origin and possible meaning of the name *Yahweh*, see Charles R. Gianotti, "The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (1985):38-51.

18. Several postmodern historians, often labeled "minimalists," have argued that the Old Testament depiction of Israel's history is inaccurate and therefore must be abandoned in favor of a purely archaeological-sociological reconstruction, especially of the monarchical period. For a conservative response, see Garnett H. Reid, "Minimalism and Biblical History," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998):394-410. Two non-conservative critiques of "minimalist" biblical history are James Barr, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

19. This emphasis on the Old Testament "storyline" has resurfaced only recently in biblical studies. See Ryken and Longman, *A Complete Literary Guide*, 35-39; Albert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); and Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992), 1-54.

account of Jacob's trip away from Canaan to Haran and then back to Canaan in Genesis 29-32. This narrative forms a unit in itself, yet is a part of a larger narrative with Jacob at the center (Genesis 25-35). Both of these segments contribute to the primary plot line issuing from the problem identified in Genesis 1-11, moving to the solution announced in Genesis 12 as a promise to Abraham, and finally toward the end of the book dealing with how God works to overcome apparent impediments to his promises to Abraham. The effect is one dominant story composed of many contributing pieces. With this view toward the unity of the Old Testament message also comes the recognition that those parts which make up this whole are varied in nature. Some of them, like Jacob's story, are historical narratives. Others belong to such genres as poetry (whether set within a literary context of wisdom, as in Psalms and Proverbs, or in prophecy, as in the poetic portions of Isaiah, Jeremiah and the like); prophetic oracles of judgment or salvation; legal texts; or even lists and genealogies. We mistakenly view the Old Testament when we see it either as so cohesive that it fits together with no rough edges or as so fragmented that it cannot deliver a single story line. These writings, therefore, are one but many.

Since the Old Testament is a story, another essential feature in addition to plot involves the characters who interact with each other. As noted above, the book stands, according to its own testimony, as the self-revelation of a personal God who enters into a relationship with persons whom he has fashioned in his own likeness. What happens in the Bible is the true account of the responsive relationship between God and people up to a particular point in history. We must include this last delimitation since, according to the consensus reading of the biblical text, that relationship is ongoing at the present time, even though the authoritative written account of its beginning and defining moments reached completion when John finished writing Revelation.

The following paragraph offers a summary of the Old Testament design as it contributes to the overall purpose of God:

The Bible is a record of God's purpose to glorify himself through the kingdom he establishes. This kingdom encompasses a creation reconciled to himself and entirely responsive to his sovereignty through the mediation of his Son. God's purpose hinges on this reconciliation, a restoring of the damaged relationship between himself, his created humanity, and their environment. In the Old Testament, God reveals the initial phases of his plan to achieve this restored relationship. This plan involves a series of covenant agreements with a singular people of his

choosing in order to accomplish reconciliation with all peoples and the entire creation.<sup>20</sup>

The Old Testament reader should hold this holistic design in view when reading the Scriptures in order to keep a balanced perspective. Even though some books may not contribute as much as others to its development, all of the Old Testament materials touch on this program. Whether we are soaring with Isaiah through the "little apocalypse" (chapters 24-27), surveying the tribal borders with Joshua, or seeking answers to the tough questions of life with Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes), keeping an eye toward this overarching theme will provide a frame of understanding we need. The Old Testament is not a collection of unrelated religious essays or Israeli campfire tales. Therefore we must avoid reading it in exactly the same way we might read *The Wall Street Journal* or *Reader's Digest*. It is about something—singular, structured, and significant.

God's intent is to bring glory to himself in this relationship with his creation. Old Testament testimony speaks consistently to this aim. In a day when society celebrates the supremacy of self-will and self-expression, the believer is wise who receives God's counsel to "be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (Psalm 46:10, English Standard Version). The consummation of all history will witness the universal display of God's glory (Isaiah 66:18-23; Jeremiah 4:2), a glory reserved for him alone (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11).

### *The Lord Is King*

This design planned by God and revealed in Scripture interweaves two pivotal concepts. First, both Old and New Testaments declare his intent to establish a *righteous kingdom* whose subjects live in willed obedience to his holy character. In order to accomplish this aim, however, God seeks to mend the broken relationship between himself and the persons whom he created in his image. The steps of this reconciling process unfold in history through *successive covenants* as God transforms human beings from rebels to heirs, not by strong-arm compulsion but by

20. The work of Kenneth Barker has helped me to think in terms of the overall, large scope of the Old Testament message. See his "The Scope and Center of Old and New Testament Theology and Hope," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 293-328; and "False Dichotomies between the Testaments," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25 (March 1982):3-16.

forgiving grace. *Kingdom and covenant*—these two realities give shape and clarity to the Old Testament story.<sup>21</sup>

With one voice the Scriptures exalt God as king. His rule is acknowledged in every period of Israel's history. Before the monarchy is in place, Gideon declares that "the LORD shall rule over you" (Judges 8:23). Israel's request for a king in the days of Samuel stems from their rejection of God's authority as their true king (1 Samuel 8:7). Yahweh's rule finds frequent expression through a host of prophetic voices during the period of the monarchy, roughly from 1050 to 586 B.C. In the eighth century B.C. Isaiah affirms that the Lord reigns as king now (6:1; 32:22; 66:1) and will maintain his rule (24:23). Both Zephaniah (3:15) and Jeremiah (8:19), seventh-century-B.C. prophets, present Yahweh as king in Judah; further, Jeremiah broadens the testimony to confess that God rules over all the earth (10:7, 10). Even as he mourns the ruin of the King's great city, Jerusalem, the prophet can declare assuredly, "You, O LORD, rule forever" (Lamentations 5:19). The psalmists likewise sound this note of God's universal dominion (10:16) as they extol his majesty in poetry (7:7; 9:7; 22:28; 24:8-10; 47:2, 6-8; 95:3; 99:1-5; 103:19). Daniel, written from an exilic perspective, depicts God as the "Ancient of Days," ruling an everlasting kingdom (2:20-23; 7:9-10; 6:26-27), one that will fill the earth (2:44-45). Two prophets writing after the Babylonian exile, Zechariah and Malachi, portray Yahweh as a "great king" whose reign stretches from their day (Malachi 1:14), six and five centuries before Christ, to the "day of the LORD," when his kingdom conquers the earth (Zechariah 14:9).

Even though God rules in an absolute sense, as these texts attest, the Old Testament indicates that he delegates governmental responsibility on earth to human kings and rulers. According to Genesis 1:26-28, people are to "rule" and "subdue" other parts of the created natural world. The Pentateuch anticipates and authorizes the kingship later to come on the scene in Israel and among her neighbors (Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:11; Deuteronomy 17:14-20). When Samuel anoints Saul as the first king of Israel (1 Samuel 10), the monarchy becomes a reality. The books of Kings and Chronicles trace the succession of kings following Saul from David and Solomon through the era of the divided kingdom to the final king of

21. Much debate has centered around whether the Old Testament has a single, unifying theme. Gerhard F. Hasel argues for a "multiplex" approach. This method, he argues, recognizes the varied themes in the Old Testament without forcing the material into one necessarily artificial concept. *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 180-83. For a more recent summary of trends in the subject, see R. W. L. Moberly, "Theology of the Old Testament," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies*, eds. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 452-78.

Judah, Zedekiah, whose reign ended with the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36).

Serving as God's delegated leaders, these kings are charged with modeling submission to him before the people (Deuteronomy 17:18-20; 1 Samuel 12:13-15; 1 Kings 2:3-4). Disloyalty to God's commandments, however, becomes the sad legacy of most kings. Beginning with Saul, they disregard his directives in pursuit of their own agendas, only to bring judgment upon themselves and their people. Much of the prophetic literature takes up this note of indictment—toward the people *en masse*, to be sure, but especially targeting the leaders (Jeremiah 22; Ezekiel 34). The hallmark of God's kingdom is to be willful, loving submission to his righteous precepts (Isaiah 56:1-5; Micah 6:8); yet his own people, led astray by self-serving leaders in the Old Testament monarchy, betray this trust.

These kings do not write the final chapter in the story, though. The image of another King emerges within the Hebrew Scriptures. The human pedigree of this Ruler traces back to humble origins, back to Judah within Israelite tribal bloodlines (Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17), back to David's stock (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5). He comes as a human being—born as a child, says Isaiah (9:6)—yet with roots springing out of eternal soil (Micah 5:2). No human monarch can stand beside this one, for his strength is that of God himself (1 Samuel 2:10). Absolute supremacy over all nations belongs legitimately to him. None of earth's great kings poses any semblance of a threat to his dominion; on the contrary, they bow before him as *their* king, King of kings in fact (Psalm 2:6-12; Daniel 7:13-14; Isaiah 49:7; 52:15; 60:3; 62:2; Zechariah 9:9-10).

Unlike the royal rebels who dominated Israel's throne, this King administers a government of unprecedented righteousness and justice (Psalm 72; Isaiah 32; Micah 4:1-5). Forgiveness and blessing overrun his kingdom (Isaiah 35; 43:22-44:5). Ironically, this great King himself has restored the breach between his holy character and his subjects' persistent inclination toward evil and folly. Thus he not only sits as their king, but he also stands before God to minister as their priest (Psalm 110:2-4; Zechariah 6:12-13).<sup>22</sup>

God begins to fulfill his promise about the kingdom when Jesus comes to earth the first time (Luke 1:32-33). Both John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2) and Jesus (Matthew 4:17) announce the coming of the kingdom. Although it was a present reality during Jesus' lifetime (Luke 17:20-

22. See the summary of the Old Testament "kingdom" concept in Barker, "The Scope and Center," 305-18.

21), the kingdom awaits its final form (Revelation 11:15). Both Peter (Acts 2:34-39) and Philip (Acts 8:12) point to Jesus as its focal point.

The book of Acts also reveals that Paul sounded a kingdom note in his ministry (19:8; 28:23, 31). He explains its nature in his letters (Romans 15:12; 1 Corinthians 15:24-25; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:5), as do James (2:25), Peter (2 Peter 1:10-11), and the writer of Hebrews (12:28). Revelation begins with a vision of the king (1:5) and ends with a vision of his kingdom (20:4, 6; 21:1-5). Clearly, then, the kingdom theme lies at the heart of the two testaments.

### *God's Contracts*

In addition to this kingdom theme, the second concept central to the design of God in the Old Testament is that of covenant. Its prominence as a leading idea in the biblical materials is apparent from the fact that Paul labels the Hebrew Scriptures "the old covenant" in 2 Corinthians 3:14. In a similar fashion, the writer of Hebrews refers to the "first covenant" in contrast to the "new covenant" (9:15). English versions refer to the two parts of the Bible as the Old and New Testaments, somewhat misleading titles since our idea of "testament" carries the connotation of a bequest following death, as in a "last will and testament." The Greek word translated "testament" or "covenant" is *diatheke* and is the usual way the New Testament writers rendered the Hebrew word *berith*, meaning "covenant."

Since the concept of "covenant" is critical to the Old Testament story, we must try to get a handle on what this word *berith* suggests. The precise origin of the word is disputed. By studying how it is used, however, both in the Hebrew Bible and in documents written in languages kin to Hebrew, we gain understanding of what "covenant" means in the Old Testament. The word suggests various kinds of agreements, some between human parties exclusively (Genesis 21:27; Joshua 9:15) and others between God and people. The agreement formalized through a covenant entails three components: a relationship of some sort, a promissory element, and some level of obligation among the covenant parties. A covenant, then, formalizes by oath a pledged relationship in which the participants receive certain promises and assume certain obligations.<sup>23</sup>

23. Literature on the covenant theme abounds. For helpful insights, see Thomas E. McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985); *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), s.v. "berith," by Gordon W. McConville; and O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).

Although we seldom use the actual term "covenant" in modern contexts, these ideas basic to the word are still common. Parties entering into a business arrangement or transaction are wise to put the terms of their agreement in writing. Such contracts in today's culture entail the same concerns as ancient Near Eastern covenants: a formalized relationship involving certain promises and responsibilities. Contractual documents define what is expected of all sides participating in the agreement. A specific form of contract familiar to us and relevant to Old Testament covenant arrangements between God and people is the marriage "contract." The bride and the groom make certain promises to each other; reciprocally, they obligate themselves in mutual faithfulness. Although a relationship between the two partners exists before the formal "contract" is made, the marriage bond which emerges from the formal agreement now defines the new relationship. This covenantal parallel involving marriage may help to explain why God often portrays his covenant people as his "bride" or "wife" in the Old Testament. The metaphor illustrates well the idea of covenant.

The Old Testament presents *four primary covenants* involved in God's plan to reconcile humans to himself and establish his kingdom on the earth. Some theologians speak of additional covenants, including the eternal covenant/covenant of redemption; the Adamic covenant/covenant of works; the Edenic covenant/covenant of grace; the Levitical covenant; and the Palestinian covenant. My concern, however, lies only with those covenants which are part of God's revealed programs of reconciling humanity to himself and which meet two criteria. First, we will examine only those agreements the Bible specifically calls "covenants," using the term *berith*. Second, we will study only those covenants which appear after Genesis 1-11. These chapters form the "introduction" to the Old Testament in that they set forth the problem prompting God's redemptive program. Within the context of these chapters of Genesis, God's covenant with Noah is not redemptive as such. Its main role is that of a preservation promise, assuring protection to the human race (Genesis 9:9-11), although it is the first designated covenant in the Bible (Genesis 6:18). The major covenants mentioned as such in God's program are the *covenant with Abraham, the covenant with Israel through Moses, the covenant with David, and the New Covenant*. For our purposes, we will call these the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants, formally noted as "covenants" in Genesis 15:18; Exodus 19:5; 2 Samuel 23:5; and Jeremiah 31:33, respectively.

These redemptive covenants are expressions of God's design to restore the broken relationship between himself and the people he

created. In fact, they serve as vehicles to express this loving relationship he seeks with us. We are very much tuned in to God's redemptive intent when we view Old Testament covenant arrangements as statements of the relationship between a loving God and his people.

*"I Will Be Their God"*

As we read the Old Testament, we must keep God's kingdom design in view. His purpose is to glorify himself by renewing his relationship with his creation, including humanity. To that end, Yahweh chooses a singular people and pledges himself in covenant loyalty to that people. As the covenants with Israel reveal, his relationship with them serves to extend reconciliation to all people. What seems at first an individual and tribal concern actually embraces the destiny of every human being. At the heart of God's grace lies his initiative to redeem and to welcome as his own anyone who will respond to his offer in believing loyalty.

The Old Testament is all about this relationship. Its essence resurfaces over and over all the way from Genesis to Malachi in the form of a concise affirmation, sometimes referred to as the "covenant formula." The words are those of the Lord himself: "I will be their God, and they will be my people." This contract conveys in summary form the goal of God's covenant dealings with all people. The truth expressed in the statement is the kingdom of God. He pledges himself to loyalty in the relationship with his covenant people. He will be God to them, bringing to bear for them all the attributes and character of deity. In turn, Israel and, in its consummate, expanded sense, all his people identify themselves exclusively with the Lord God. Their devotion and allegiance to him are unrivaled.

The covenant contract appears within the context of each of the four primary covenants and at other key points in the Old Testament. It plays a prominent role in New Testament revelation as well, anticipating ultimate realization in the kingdom of Christ. This statement of relationship thus binds together both testaments in an expression of the great goal of all history, both personal and universal.<sup>24</sup> God first announces this intention to Abraham in Genesis 17 where he renews the covenant he has already made with the patriarch by authorizing circumcision as the covenant sign. Yahweh's intent is, "to be your God and the God of your

24. See Robertson's excellent analysis of this statement in *The Christ of the Covenants*, 45-52. Rendtorff gives a thorough survey of the covenant formula, though from a critical perspective, in *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1998).



descendants after you" (17:7). He renews this pledge to Isaac (26:24) and to Jacob (28:15) in slightly different words.

The Mosaic covenant likewise carries with it the assurance of the covenant contract. In announcing his plan to deliver Israel from bondage in Egypt, God declares his intent: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7). Following the actual exodus deliverance, God reminds Israel of this existing relationship he has with them (Exodus 19:4-6). The tabernacle instructions, a detailed part of this covenant God makes with Israel through Moses, link God's symbolic dwelling with his people to the covenant relationship. As the Lord himself puts it, "Then I will dwell among the sons of Israel and be their God" (Exodus 29:45). Levitical portions of the Mosaic covenant also affirm the contract (Leviticus 11:45; 22:33; 25:38; 26:12, 44-45). As Israel complies with these intricate, detailed codes involving such matters as food, hygiene, and festival days, she demonstrates externally a loyalty which first exists internally. The wilderness travels include reminders of the covenant formula (Numbers 15:41), particularly as Deuteronomy records the renewal of the Mosaic covenant on the plains of Moab before the Israelites cross Jordan into Canaan (4:20; 29:12-13).

Centuries later prophets rehearse Israel's prior failure to keep the covenant loyalty originally expressed by the contract. The people of Jeremiah's era, for example, deny in fact their identity as "God's people" by "doing more evil than their fathers" (Jeremiah 7:23-26; 11:4). In the ninth century B.C., God instructs Hosea to name his second son, "Lo-Ammi," meaning "not my people" because "you are not my people, and I am not your God" (1:9).

Around 1000 B.C. David responds to God's covenant promise in a prayer. Significantly, the king provides his own generation with this reminder: "You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, O LORD, have become their God" (2 Samuel 7:24; see also 1 Chronicles 17:22). The key provision of this covenant which God makes with David involves the assurance that David will have a descendant reigning on the throne in Jerusalem forever. Late in the seventh and early in the sixth centuries B.C. this promise seemed in jeopardy as Babylonian incursions toward the west threatened the security of the Davidic monarchy in Judah. With words of assurance, Jeremiah envisions a Davidic ruler rising from the nation to serve as an intercessor before God on behalf of the people. The bottom line to this comforting oracle is the renewed pledge, "You will be my people, and I will be your God" (Jeremiah 30:22).

These three covenants merge into the provisions announced within a "new" covenant God will make with his people. Despite its innovations, even this covenant carries with it the contract first expressed long before to Abraham. Its fulfillment is the realization of all the Old Testament covenant goals when "they will be my people, and I will be their God" (Jeremiah 24:7) as they choose to obey him from a loyal heart (31:1, 33; 32:38; Ezekiel 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:27; see also Joel 2:26-27). God's ultimate goal of reconciling all people to himself becomes reality through this covenant (Zechariah 8:8; 13:9).

In keeping with this hope, the first page of the New Testament announces the coming of the one who will "save His people," the one whose name is "Immanuel—which means, 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:21-23). An angel of the Lord advises a priest named Zechariah that his son John will pave the way for this Savior; in fact, as Luke puts it, John will "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). This theme of the covenant contract continues in Acts where, in 15:14, the Jerusalem council hears James conclude that God is "taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name," leaving no doubt that the relationship reaches beyond the physical descendants of Abraham. The New Testament letters echo this truth. Paul applies the covenant contract to people of faith among the Gentiles in Romans 9:25-26, citing Hosea. In 2 Corinthians 6:16 he links the contract to God's desire for a loyal people, a people devoted exclusively to him. Hebrews 8:10 quotes Jeremiah's citation of the covenant formula as evidence of New Covenant fulfillment in the ministry of Jesus. Peter also explains that those trusting God's chosen and precious cornerstone, Jesus Christ, are "a people belonging to God." "Once you were not a people," he reminds them, "but now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:9-10). John envisions the climactic day, that great day of the Lord, when in the New Jerusalem, "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and will be their God" (Revelation 21:3, King James Version).

A vivid metaphor in the Old Testament illustrates this unique relationship. God's people are his *segullah*, his "treasured possession." "If you obey my voice completely and keep my covenant, then you will be my treasured possession out of all the peoples" (my translation), Yahweh declares in Exodus 19:5, a key Mosaic covenant context. In the ancient Near East, the Hebrew term *segullah* and its cognates in other Semitic languages referred in a literal sense to a king's private purse. This literal usage appears in the Old Testament in 1 Chronicles 29:3 and Ecclesiastes 2:8. The word came to denote a special relationship between a ruler and

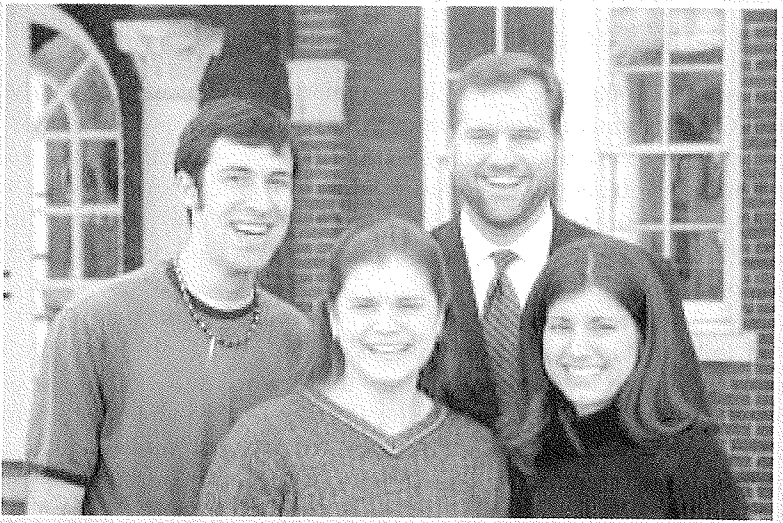
his favorite subjects. Those people were his "private property," in a sense. In the Old Testament, God chooses Abraham's seed as his *segullah*; the term takes on particular overtones involving the covenant relationship. The Lord reminds Israel three more times in Deuteronomy that they are his special treasure (7:6; 14:2; 26:18). Both Psalms (135:4) and the prophets (Malachi 3:17) speak of the relationship between God and his people in terms of this metaphor.

New Testament writers pick up on the concept and include all people of faith as God's unique possession. Paul looks ahead to the final manifestation of God's kingdom for "those who are God's possession" (Ephesians 1:14; Titus 2:14). Quoting Exodus 19, Peter views the church as "a people belonging to God" (New International Version), the New Testament equivalent of *segullah* (I Peter 2:9). Many people have misunderstood the KJV's rendering of the phrase, "a peculiar people." The English word "peculiar" comes from the Latin *peculium*, meaning one's own possession or property. This sense of "peculiar" is exactly what *segullah* in the Old Testament and *peripoiesis*, the Greek word in the New Testament, suggest. Peter is not saying that God's people are kooky or weird; rather, he is reminding his persecuted readers that theirs is a privileged position. They follow in the covenant line of blessing first offered to Abraham and through him to everyone.

#### CONCLUSION

Because the "old Bible," as the lady in Sunday school called it, is about the plan of an eternal God to glorify himself through a redeemed creation, it is ever new. Lost humanity needs the redeemer promised in the Old Covenant and sent in the New. Whether we study and proclaim its inception (Old Testament) or its consummation (New Testament), this gospel is the hope of all the nations.

I was never as aware of this fact as in 1999 when I taught a class of Russian pastors the Old Testament at a Bible institute in Siberia. Before the session began, the director of the school challenged me. He explained, "For Russians, the Old Testament is strange and mysterious. They don't understand much of it, so they avoid it in their preaching." Imagine my joy when, at the completion of the term, several of the students commented, "We can't wait to return to our churches so we can share the Old Testament with them." To paraphrase the classic hymn, our toil in the Word God richly repays. As we sit before the Book at his feet, may our prayer always be, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law" (Psalm 119:18).



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# Hell in the New Testament

## INTRODUCTION

The waters of theological controversy continue to swirl about the traditional doctrine of hell, threatening fair to extinguish its flames. Among many questions involved are these:

Does the Christian faith require belief in eternal, conscious punishment for the lost?

What is the relationship between Hades and Gehenna in the New Testament?

Did Jesus "descend into hell," and (correlatively) did his redemptive acts result in a change in the situation of the dead?

Do the New Testament references to hell reflect, or accommodate, the views current in Judaism, or in the Greek world, at the time?

My purpose is not to delve into these correlative issues in detail, although all of them will be touched on.<sup>1</sup> Instead, my purpose is to focus primarily on the biblical text, attempting to lead out of the New Testament what it has to say to us about hell.

### HELL IN THE THINKING OF THE GREEKS OR JEWS OF JESUS' DAY

Before the exegesis, however, I will give brief attention to views of the Greeks and Jews of Jesus' day as a matter of background. These views were part of the cultural milieu of New Testament times, and they introduce us to some of the interpretive issues we will encounter. The discussion revolves around the two key words in the New Testament, *hades* and *gehenna*.

I begin where many others begin, with Joachim Jeremias's treatment of these two words.<sup>2</sup> He gives more attention to Hades since there is little difference of opinion about the meaning of Gehenna. In brief, the Jewish perspective on Hades went through stages. At first, it was precisely equal to the Hebrew *sheol*, for which it was used as a translation consistently

1. For an excellent survey of current views on eternal punishment versus annihilation see Robert A. Peterson, "Undying Worm, Unquenchable Fire," *Christianity Today* (October 23, 2000), 30-37. See also William Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992); David George Moore, *The Battle for Hell* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, Inc., 1995).

2. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. G. W. Bromiley, s.v. "hades" and "gehenna," by Joachim Jeremias.

throughout the Greek Old Testament (LXX). In this sense, little more was meant than "the realm of the dead" for all people, both wicked and righteous.

In time, however, another stage was reached: post-exilic Judaism as influenced by Persians, Greeks, and Diaspora Jews. Under such influences, rabbinic Judaism adopted a belief in resurrection and retribution after death (resisted, of course, by the Sadducees), along with the idea that Hades/Sheol was a place of punishment in the underworld occupied only by the ungodly. Jeremias thinks, therefore, that the Judaism of Jesus' day was characterized by a mingling of the two views: on the one hand, that Hades was the sphere of all the dead; on the other hand that it was the temporary abode of the wicked only. Jeremias believes that this ambiguity carried over into the New Testament, where sometimes (as in Acts 2:27, 31) Hades is the realm of all the dead, and sometimes (as in Revelation 20:13f.) the place only of the souls of the ungodly.

Furthermore, Jeremias thinks that the New Testament unanimously makes a sharp distinction between Hades and Gehenna, with Hades (in the later sense) being a temporary holding place until the final judgment when it is replaced by Gehenna, the Lake of Fire. Gehenna represents, originally, the valley outside Jerusalem on the south where children were sacrificed to the god Moloch in the days of Ahaz and Manasseh. This consequently accursed place became a repository of all sorts of refuse, including "the dead bodies of animals and of unburied criminals who had been executed."<sup>3</sup> By the time of the New Testament the place had finally come to represent the eternal hell of the ungodly, although earlier in the first century it had some usage as the place of punishment during the intermediate state. Jeremias thinks New Testament usage is settled: Gehenna stands for the final Lake of Fire where the bodies and souls of the wicked are reunited after the final resurrection for eternal fire.

Hans Bietenhard adds to our understanding of this more or less "standard" view of Jeremias. Hades was regarded by the classical Greek writers as "the abode of [all] the dead, who lead a shadowy existence" there; only gradually did the Greeks also attach ideas of reward and punishment, both being meted out there, respectively, to the righteous and the wicked.<sup>4</sup> He agrees with Jeremias that Hades has more than one meaning in the New Testament: "According to Acts 2:17, 31 and Lk. 16:23, 26, all the dead are in Hades. According to other passages, only the spirits of the ungodly are in Hades (1 Pet. 3:19; Rev. 20:13f.)."<sup>5</sup>

3. Joseph Henry Thayer, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "geenna."

4. *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, s.v. "hell, abyss, hades, gehenna, lower regions," by Hans Bietenhard.

5. *Ibid.*, 207.

I find little to argue with here, except for a certain hesitation about two points, and these introduce us to the major issues that arise in expounding the New Testament usage of the words. Scholarly opinion on these points is not unanimous.

(1) Most important, does Hades in the New Testament refer always, or nearly so, to the realm of all the dead rather than specifically to the realm of the wicked dead? E. Earle Ellis, for example, is confident that Hades, "with one exception ([Luke] 16:23) . . . has its Old Testament meaning, Sheol. It means simply death or the realm of death."<sup>6</sup> Alfred Plummer even includes Luke 16:23, observing that the rich man there is in Hades, "the receptacle of *all* the departed until the time of final judgment, and including both paradise and Gehenna. That Hades does not mean 'hell' as a place of punishment is manifest from Acts ii. 27, 31."<sup>7</sup>

W. D. Davies and Dale Allison represent what may be a more cautious view when they say, "But by the first century 'Hades' seems to have merged, at least in some minds, with 'Gehenna,' the place of damnation and punishment for the wicked." They observe that

although "gates of Hades" is a fixed expression in the OT one must beware of reading the OT meaning into Matthew's text, for conceptions about Hades and Sheol changed over time. By the first century there was a tendency to think of Hades or certain sections of it as an underworld peopled not by the dead in general but by the *ungodly* dead, as well as by demons and evil spirits. The simple equation of Hades with death probably does not hold for Mt 16.18.<sup>8</sup>

Without anticipating too much the results of exegesis to be obtained below, I will say, for now, that I am not convinced that Hades, in the thinking of any New Testament character, including Jesus, represented the temporary abode of all the dead, both godly and ungodly, after death. Indeed, all those who defend the equation rely heavily on Acts 2:27ff. But this is not convincing, given that this is a direct quotation from the Old Testament. Peter used it to mean precisely what it meant when David first uttered it. But this is not evidence that any New Testament persons, Peter included, still used the word Hades in that sense.

6. E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, in *The New Century Bible Commentary*, ed. Matthew Black (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 157.

7. Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, n.d.), 393-94.

8. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 2:269.

(2) Of somewhat less importance, I remain hesitant about making a uniformly sharp distinction between Hades and Gehenna in the New Testament. Again I mention the observation of Davies and Allison cited above. Others make at least passing observations that suggest some merging of the two in popular thought. Joseph Thayer seems to think that Gehenna, at one point at least, "was transferred to that place in Hades where the wicked after death will suffer punishment."<sup>9</sup> Jeremias reports that "in the 1st cent. A.D. [Gehenna] was further extended to cover the place where the ungodly were punished in the intermediate state,"<sup>10</sup> although he is confident this was not reflected in the New Testament at all. Bieterhard (also referring to pre-New Testament thinking) likewise observes that "in time *gehenna* became simply the place of punishment and so attracted the corresponding ideas about Hades . . . [and thus] became a temporary place of punishment (until the final judgment)."<sup>11</sup> Peter Davids, commenting on James 3:6, refers to "Gehenna (or Hades)," as "usually the place in which evil beings are tormented or imprisoned."<sup>12</sup>

I do not object to the concepts represented in this distinction: no doubt there is an intermediate state of punishment for the ungodly, to be replaced at the last judgment by a permanent place. I am simply not sure that those who used the words in the New Testament were doing so with such a distinction in mind. Revelation 20:14, of course, includes this very distinction; but even there it would be impossible to demonstrate that John thought of the Lake of Fire as "Gehenna," specifically, since he does not use that name. And the Revelation may well represent an advance in thinking, on this point, that was not all that clearly drawn earlier.

I am not certain. The reasons for my hesitation are several, although not of the nature of clear demonstration.

(1) The words themselves had their origins in two different languages. Hades is a Greek word, Gehenna Hebrew. It would have been easy, therefore, for their semantic ranges to overlap.

(2) The words are not all that widely used to begin with, so that we do not have a broad range of evidence. Hades appears in the Septuagint, but not Gehenna. Neither Philo nor Josephus uses Gehenna. In the New Testament, except for James 3:6, only Jesus uses Gehenna. Hades, used just three times by Jesus, is otherwise limited (except for the quotation in

9. Thayer.

10. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*gehenna*."

11. Bieterhard.

12. Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 143.



Acts 2) to the book of Revelation. In essence, then, Jesus is the only person using both terms, and his use of Hades is very limited by comparison.

(3) As the survey below will show, the two share many common characteristics.

(4) Though subjective, it seems to me that there are instances where the terms are interchangeable, especially if one were not consciously drawing a sharp distinction between the temporary place and the eternal one. In particular, I note two things. First, in every instance where Gehenna is used, it seems to me that Hades would have been equally appropriate. Second, for the most part, with the possible exception of the Revelation, Hades appears in the New Testament when the language of the Old Testament is being directly or indirectly reflected.

These issues, especially the first, will arise again in the exegesis to follow.

#### PASSAGES WHERE THE TWO MAIN WORDS OCCUR

##### *Hades*

Hades is a true Greek word transliterated into English. It appears 10 times in the Greek text (both the *Textus Receptus*—hereafter TR—and the critical text): Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14. It occurs an eleventh time in the Majority Text, in 1 Corinthians 15:55.<sup>13</sup> It is always translated *hell* in the King James Version, but—to distinguish it from hell as a translation of *Gehenna*—always *Hades* in the New King James Version (NKJV) and New American Standard Bible (NASB).<sup>14</sup>

A survey of the passages just listed, in order, yields the following.

1. *Matthew 11:20-14; Luke 10:15*. The United Bible Societies text sets Matthew 11:13 in poetic form, which we may render more or less literally:

*And you, Capernaum,  
You were not lifted up to heaven, were you?<sup>15</sup>  
You will be cast down to Hades!*

13. It also appears, instead of *death*, in some manuscripts in Acts 2:24 but not with sufficient evidence to warrant its inclusion in any version of the text with which I am familiar.

14. The New International Version (NIV), attempting to be sensitive to contextual subtleties, uses *depths*, *hell*, and *Hades*.

15. Whether this line is a question expecting a negative answer or a straightforward negative assertion is a textual issue.

The wording consciously reflects Isaiah 14:12-15, where the king of Babylon was rebuked (and, apparently, Satan behind him) as one who in pride determined to occupy heaven, but who instead would be brought down to Sheol.

It is possible to regard this as altogether poetic-dramatic. This is probably the reason the NIV uses *the skies* and *the depths* (instead of heaven and Hades), representing the depths of humiliation in ironic contrast to the heights of exaltation. But given the full context, it seems clear that Hades also is ultimately a destiny, one where those who have not repented toward God are consigned in judgment.

Jesus' words, after all, were occasioned by the refusal of these cities to repent. To emphasize this, he added that had the miracles they witnessed been done in Tyre and Sidon those cities would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. The choice between heaven and Hades, then, is the very issue involved in repentance toward God; it is therefore the crucial issue at the judgment. Indeed, according to Jesus, it will be more bearable for Sodom than for Capernaum on "judgment day," when Capernaum will be consigned to Hades.

It is clear, then, that Hades is a specific destiny: (1) one directly opposite to heaven,<sup>16</sup> (2) one for those unrepentant toward God, and (3) one to which people are assigned by God's judgment. The brief comment of Donald Hagner, here, that *Hades* is "the unseen realm of the dead"<sup>17</sup> therefore seems both too bland and contextually insensitive.

2. *Matthew 16:17-20*. At Caesarea Philippi, discussing with the disciples his identity, Jesus revealed that Hades can stand for forces aligned against Christ's program to build his church. He said, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (v. 18, NASB). The words make clear that Hades is set against the church but will not triumph in that conflict.

Why "*the gates of Hades*"? This expression occasions considerable interpretive discussion, too much to survey here.<sup>18</sup> Apparently it represents Hades, at least metaphorically, as a city. In ancient times, for a city to have gates meant that it had a wall and was therefore fortified. If its

16. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 425, likewise notes the fact that Hades is "spatially the opposite of heaven" in this saying of Jesus.

17. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33A of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David H. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 314.

18. For a thorough survey, see Jack P. Lewis, "The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail against It" (Matt 16:18): A Study of the History of Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (September 1995):349-67.

gates could be breached, the whole city was subject to conquest. Anyone "within the gates" was under the protection of, and to be identified with, the city.

Hagner reminds us that the "gates of Hades" is an expression found both in the Old Testament and in intertestamental writings; he believes it is synonymous with "gates of death," also an Old Testament phrase (Job 38:17; Psalm 9:13; 107:18), based on the fact that Hades was commonly used for Sheol as "the realm of the dead."<sup>19</sup> He suggests that we should take "gates" as either symbolic of "the powers of" or, more likely, an instance of synecdoche, with the part (gates) representing the whole (Hades). He cites Marcus as regarding the gates of Hades as "an antitype of the implied gates of heaven . . . with the background being one of apocalyptic conflict."<sup>20</sup>

I would suggest, then, that *the gates of Hades* stands for Hades itself, for the entire population of the underworld assembled for war.<sup>21</sup> We have, in effect, two assemblies, two realms set in array against each other. In the Greek culture of the time, the word for church (*ekklesia*) was often used to mean the assembly of the citizens privileged to carry on the affairs of a city. So in this cosmic "tale of two cities,"<sup>22</sup> the church and Hades are set against one another in battle array, and Hades, the realm of the forces of evil, will not triumph.<sup>23</sup> Interpreters divide over whether Hades or the church is the aggressor, but that seems beside the point.

Here, too, Hades stands across from heaven. In the context Jesus offers to Peter and to the church the resources of heaven. The "keys" assure them that they will be able to loose or bind in such a way as to reflect heaven's triumph over Hades.

**3. Luke 16:19-31** is Jesus' narrative of the rich man and Lazarus. Here (v. 28) Hades is (or at least includes) a "place of torment" for the ungodly after death.<sup>24</sup> This passage provides our most direct view into Hades.

19. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, vol. 33B of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 471.

20. *Ibid.*

21. There is considerable reason to believe that Hades represented, among other things, *the underworld*.

22. My apologies to Dickens.

23. It is possible, when Jesus says that the gates of Hades will not prevail against *her*, that this refers to the *rock* rather than the *church*. Both nouns are feminine. I am reasonably satisfied that *church* is the antecedent, as the nearer noun; but the final truth is the same either way. The antagonist of Hades is the church built on the rock.

24. I devote no time to the question whether the account is a "parable." The text does not present it as such, and even if it did that would provide no reason for demythologizing or deconstructing it. Indeed, many "parables" are straightforward descriptions of reality, especially those that are not mere allegory. The parable of the "rich fool" (Luke 12) is a prime example.

Many interpreters assume that both Lazarus and the rich man are, after death, in Hades—reflecting the common view that *Hades* (and the Old Testament *Sheol*) refers in general to the place of all the dead, both godly and ungodly. Not only is that more than can be determined from the text, it is in fact unlikely. Only the rich man is portrayed as being “in Hades.” Lazarus, in deliberate contrast, was carried by the angels “to the bosom of Abraham.”<sup>25</sup> The reference to angels would almost certainly have been understood by Jesus’ hearers to indicate an upward, heavenward destiny. When the rich man lifts his eyes (the upward direction, again), he sees Lazarus “far away” (NASB and NIV for *apo makrothen, from afar*). Abraham himself testifies that “a great chasm” (*chasma mega*) has been “fixed” between them.

By far the more natural reading of the text, then, is that Lazarus is *not* in Hades.<sup>26</sup> And, once more, the contrast between Hades and heaven is implicit but clear. Even Ellis acknowledges that “the ‘gulf’ apparently is between Hades and the heavenly realms.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the connection with the lack of repentance is also involved again: the rich man is well aware of what his brothers need to do in order to avoid the same destiny as his.

The Hades of the rich man is primarily characterized as a place of torment. Two different words are used, each twice, to make this point. In vv. 23 and 28 the word is the noun *basanos, torture, torment*, indicating severe pain. In vv. 24 and 25 the word is the verb *odunao, feel pain*. Where the noun focuses more on the cause, the verb focuses more on the experience. When the NASB and NIV translate the latter as “be in agony,” they have caught the idea precisely.

The source of the rich man’s agony is, simply, “this flame.” Thus Hades (like Gehenna as we will see) is a place where fire is the instrument of punishment.

The interchange between the rich man and Abraham, relative to the “great chasm” between the two, and the fact that there is no passage between them in either direction, is obviously intended to make the point that the relative destinies of the two are fixed. Their conditions are

25. The phrase probably suggests a banquet scene.

26. Marshall speaks ambiguously about whether Lazarus was in Hades. Commenting on Luke 10:15 he observes (I think correctly) that “Whereas in the OT it was the place of the dead in general, in NT times it was increasingly regarded as a temporary place of punishment for the ungodly” (425). But here he speaks of it as the “intermediate abode of the dead before the final judgment” and observes that “only the rich man appears to be in Hades,” emphasizing the word “appears” (636). He adds that “this depends on where we regard Abraham’s bosom as being situated.”

27. Ellis, 206.

equally permanent and "irrevocable," to use the word chosen by I. H. Marshall; he adds that "there is no suggestion of purgatory."<sup>28</sup>

4. *Acts 2:22-32*, part of Peter's "sermon" at Pentecost, uses the Greek word *Hades* as a translation for the Hebrew word *Sheol* in the Old Testament. Indeed, the LXX regularly renders *Sheol* by *Hades*.

This inter-textual sharing of *Hades* and *Sheol* may well mean that, whatever *Sheol* denoted to the readers of the Old Testament, *Hades* could also denote in the New Testament (at least to its Jewish readers). We must not, however, be too hasty in reaching this conclusion. It is clear that the New Testament could use a word with a focus different from that of the same word in the LXX.

Regardless, we need not doubt that Peter used *Hades*, in *Acts 2:27, 31* in the same way *Sheol* was used in the Hebrew original of *Psalm 16:10*. Even so, we should focus on its meaning for Peter, and in order to determine this, we must discern Peter's point. He is speaking directly about the resurrection of Christ (v. 24), which he defines specifically as God's "putting an end to the agony of death" (NASB).

Peter then reinforces this by indicating that it was not possible for Jesus to be held by death (the obvious antecedent of "it" in the original of v. 24). In order to explain his confident affirmation, Peter cites *Psalm 16:8-11*. There David expressed a similar confidence: his flesh will have its settled dwelling in hope because God will not abandon his soul or life (*psuche*) in (or, to) *Hades*.

David could not have been speaking primarily of himself, Peter realizes (v. 29). Instead, as a prophet who understood the significance of the Davidic covenant, he was speaking of the resurrection of Messiah, of whom it can now be said, "He was not abandoned to *Hades*, nor did his flesh see corruption."

Clearly, then, we can substitute the Hebrew *Sheol* for *Hades* here, and this means that *Hades*, here, may well represent what was apparently a broad—and more or less "neutral"—usage of *Sheol* in the Old Testament to mean the abode of all the dead, righteous or wicked. Many interpreters do just that and cite this passage in *Acts* as evidence (although this proves nothing for the rest of New Testament usage). The meaning of both the *Psalm* and Peter's application, understood this way, is that Jesus was not left dead, he was not abandoned or left in the grave (*Sheol/Hades*). God raised him from the dead.

Even so, it remains at least possible that *Hades* has a somewhat more negative denotation here. This arises because even *Sheol* apparently

28. Marshall, 638.

came to denote *especially* the place of the *wicked* dead, a destiny which could be considered only with great dread, one the righteous would desire to avoid at all costs. If this were the case *here*, Peter would apparently mean that God did not give Jesus over, did not abandon him, to Hades.<sup>29</sup> Then the resurrection is the *evidence* of this rather than the deliverance from Hades itself. I will return to this after completing the survey of usage in the New Testament.

Does the original affirmation of David in Psalm 16 help with this interpretive issue? Probably not: Peter's usage is very true to the original. Perhaps the only difference is that the original has a word that may mean "the pit" (NASB) or "grave," or "corruption," where Acts has "corruption" (following the LXX). But the difference is not large; even Delitzsch, who thinks the LXX should have used *bothros*, *pit*, here, still insists that the meaning of "see the pit" is "equivalent to, to succumb to the state of the grave, *i.e.* death."<sup>30</sup>

At least one other exegetical feature should be mentioned here, in the form of a question: Is the next line an instance of Hebrew (synonymous) parallelism? In other words, does "His flesh did not see corruption" mean the same thing as "He was not abandoned in/to Hades"? A positive answer to this, as seems likely, may incline one toward the "neutral" meaning indicated above. It certainly seems to mean what is obviously true, that the body of Jesus did not decay in the grave. John Polhill, for example, is confident that "the phrases are parallel, both expressing David's hope that God would not abandon him to death." He adds: "The reference is to *Sheol*, the realm of the dead, and thus to death."<sup>31</sup>

5. *Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14*. In these four occurrences of the word in the Revelation, Hades is linked closely with death in an almost technical formula, "death and Hades." What we have just seen in Acts and other passages prepares us for this.

In 1:18 the exalted Jesus of John's vision, upon affirming his death and resurrection, asserts, "I possess the keys of death and Hades." In 6:8 the fourth of the famous horsemen of the Apocalypse, the rider on the pale green horse, is named "Death, and Hades was following with him." In 20:13-14, at the scene of the final judgment, "Death and Hades

29. The Hebrew *lamedh* (before *Sheol*) and the Greek *eis* (before *Hades*) are at least as likely to mean *to as in*.

30. Franz Delitzsch, *The Psalms*, in *Old Testament Commentaries | Nehemiah to Psalm LXXVII* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., n.d.), 1001-2.

31. John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 113.

delivered up the dead who were in them" to be judged, and afterward "Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire." We may add to these 1 Corinthians 15:55 where in the TR the poetic couplet reads, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"<sup>32</sup> Several things seem reasonably clear from these passages, as follows.

First, the risen Jesus now possesses the "keys" of death and Hades. Keys may indicate access, the ability to lock up, or ultimate authority and control over. Perhaps there is an element of all these here. Jesus, having been given over temporarily to the power and dominion of death and Hades, has triumphed over these allied enemies in his resurrection from the dead. He is both Victor and Master in this realm.

Second, Hades itself, together with its dreadful partner Death, has a final destiny of its own: the eternal Lake of Fire. The most natural reading of this is that all Hades' inhabitants share that destiny. Thus David Aune observes that "Death and Hades" stands here "for all the unrighteous dead in accord with v 15, where it is stated that all whose names were not found in the book of life were cast into the lake of fire."<sup>33</sup> (This seems preferable to the view of G. R. Beasley-Murray that Death and Hades are simply "personified" as dominions that have held sway over men; that they are cast into the Lake of Fire, therefore, signifies that "their power over man has ended."<sup>34</sup>)

Third, the close linkage between death and Hades seems clearly to imply that, in significant ways, they are equivalent—but with an important qualification. The fact that the two words might be interchanged in 1 Corinthians 15:55, without noticeable difference in meaning, may support this, together with the way Peter used Psalm 16:10 in Acts 2.

Does this force us to conclude, then, that *Hades* in the Revelation means nothing more than "neutral" *death*, equally expected by the godly and the ungodly? Not necessarily, and here is the qualification: the more one ponders these four passages that link death and Hades, the more it is clear that *all of them cast the two in a deliberately negative and ominous light*. In Revelation 1:18 Jesus possesses the keys of death and Hades because he has risen in triumph over them as the archenemies of his life and mission into whose power he had temporarily fallen. In Revelation 6:8 the personified pair go forth to kill by various means—instruments of God's judgment, no doubt, but killers nonetheless. In Revelation 20:13-14 they

32. The critical text uses *Death* in both parts and reverses *sting* and *victory*.

33. David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 1103.

34. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, in *The New Century Bible Commentary*, ed. Matthew Black (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 303.

give up their dead for judgment and, in concert with them, are forcibly cast into the eternal Lake of Fire. The “death and Hades” of these passages most certainly depict death, yes, but death for the wicked, death as “enemy” (1 Corinthians 15:26), death such as would defeat the good and godly were it allowed to prevail. From such death every redeemed person has hope of deliverance.

The survey complete, I am ready now to suggest what seems to me to be an important conclusion: namely, that in the New Testament, specifically, *Hades is never neutral*. Once realize this for the references in the Revelation, and it soon occurs that the same is true for the rest of the references. Even in the passage most likely to be “neutral,” Psalm 16:10 as used by Peter in Acts 2, Hades is the enemy overcome by the resurrection of Christ. It equates to “the pains of death” from which Jesus was released. That, too, is death as negative.

The view I propose, then, sees Hades as manifesting in the New Testament two levels of meaning—though not two different meanings. At the first and more general level, Hades in the New Testament is linked closely with death. But even at this level, the death meant is *death apart from redemption*, death under the curse of sin. Hades, then, is never a word that in some neutral way equates to the realm of all the dead, wicked and righteous alike—probably not even in Psalm 16:10 as used by Peter in Acts 2:27, 31.<sup>35</sup> Hades is a destiny from which those who are redeemed in Christ are delivered, the death of those unrepentant toward and unrecconciled to God.

At the second and more specific level, Hades in the New Testament is also a name for a specific place, a realm, a destiny for the ungodly after death. As such it is characterized by the factors we have seen in exegesis of the passages where the word appears. It is a place of punishment, of torment by fire, a destiny to which one is assigned by the retributive justice of God for those who have remained stubbornly unrepentant toward him.

What shall we say, then, of Peter’s application of Psalm 16:10 to Jesus’ situation? Most certainly Jesus died the kind of death that is inextricably linked with Hades. He died under the curse of sin. He died the death that is inflicted on mankind as the judgment of a holy God. He experienced the sting, the pains of such a death. But no sooner had he died than he was delivered. His soul was not left in Hades, nor did his body decay in the pit. The flames did not touch him. The wrath of a holy

35. I am not claiming this for the Old Testament usage of *Sheol* in general. Investigating that did not fall within the scope of this study.



God Jesus experienced on the cross, not in Hades. He was, instead, victorious over Death and Hades, and his victory is one that all who put faith in him, along with his father David, will share. The destiny of the rich man is not ours.

### *Gehenna*

The other word typically translated hell in the New Testament is *geenna*, used twelve times: eleven in the Synoptic Gospels—always in the words of Jesus himself—and once in James 3:6. The synoptic references are Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; and Luke 12:5. Along with the KJV, both NASB and NIV always translate this *hell*. It is of Aramaic origin, from *ge hinnom*, really *ge ben-hinnom*, valley of the sons of Hinnom, “the fiery place of final punishment in Jewish eschatology.”<sup>36</sup> See again the discussion in the first section of this paper.

Again, I choose to survey the New Testament usage in an effort to determine what, exactly, the text has to tell us about Gehenna. There is little disagreement by interpreters with the fact that Gehenna is most certainly the eternal hell. Consequently, this word need not occupy us as much as Hades.

1. Gehenna is characterized by fire, as indicated in a number of its uses, including the formulaic expression “the Gehenna of fire” (Matthew 5:22; 18:9; Mark 9:47 TR).

In Matthew 18:9 Jesus says that it is better to lose an eye than, having two, to be cast in the Gehenna of fire. In the parallel v. 8, he says it is better to be crippled or maimed than with two feet or hands to be cast into “the eternal fire”—obviously meant to say the same thing.

In the parallel Mark 9:43, where also Jesus resorts to extreme language to emphasize the horrors of hell, the word Gehenna is explained as “the unquenchable [or, inextinguishable] fire”—NIV: “the fire that never goes out.” (The equation is repeated in v. 45 in the TR.) Furthermore, Jesus adds the observation (whether three times, as in the TR, or just once, as in the critical text) that Gehenna is a place “where their worm has no end and the fire is not quenched” (v. 48).

In highly figurative and colorful language, James 3:6 compares the tongue to a fire that both “sets on fire the course of nature” and “is set on fire by Gehenna.”

The point would be difficult to miss: Gehenna is a place where fire is the instrument of punishment. This it shares in common with Hades (see above on Luke 16).

36. Marshall, 513.

2. The fire of Gehenna is “eternal,” as above in Matthew 18:8. That this fire is further characterized as “unquenchable” (Mark 9:43-48) apparently means the same thing. Davies and Allison discuss the question how long the rabbis thought the punishment of Gehenna would last. There were various views, but Jesus, “by coupling *aionios* [eternal] with ‘fire’ (18.8; 25.41; cf. 25.46), seems to show agreement with those who believed the damned would suffer for ever. . . . The wicked will be ever dying, never dead.”<sup>37</sup>

3. One can hardly miss the oft repeated phrase, *be cast* into Gehenna (Matthew 5:29; 18:9; Mark 9:45, 47; Luke 12:5). The verb is *ballo* (*emballo* in Luke 12:5), which suggests a forcible commitment.

In context the idea appears to imply judgment. The passive may very well be a “divine passive,” suggesting the judicial act of God. In one of these sayings Jesus uses the phrase “liable for” Gehenna (Matthew 5:22). The word has obvious legal connotations in these passages, indicating a judicial sentence of confinement in Gehenna.

Close to this is the phrase in Matthew 23:33, when Jesus denounces the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees: “Serpents! Sons of snakes! How can you escape the judgment [or, condemnation; some suggest ‘sentence’] of Gehenna!”

Clearly, then, being cast into Gehenna is a judicial act of God.

4. Consignment to Gehenna is a form of *destruction*: “Fear Him,” said Jesus, “who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Matthew 10:28; cf. the parallel Luke 12:5). There is no justifiable doubt that Jesus was referring to God.<sup>38</sup> For God to cast someone into Hell (Luke 12:5), then, is to sentence that person to *destruction*.

The question here is what this destruction means, and it involves especially the use of the word *apollumi*, here translated *destroy*. Does the word immediately imply annihilation, or can it indicate a kind of “destruction” that involves eternal, conscious punishment? The importance of this question calls for a careful analysis of the meaning of the word.

In the active sense, with a personal object (as here), the verb appears 17 additional times in the New Testament—although generally in a more physical way that offers little help for understanding the destruction of Gehenna. In many of these, the verb essentially amounts to another way of saying *kill* (Matthew 2:13; 12:14; 21:41; 22:7; 27:20; etc.). It focuses, for the one being killed, on the *loss* involved and, for the agent of death, the

37. Davies and Allison, 515.

38. NIV, NASB, and NKJV capitalize *Him* or *One* in the verse.

removal of the person(s) as a nuisance, threat, or danger. The verb is, therefore, a "doing away with," as we might put it.

Instances where the active verb does *not* primarily mean to take away physical life are: (1) Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34: a man with an unclean spirit asks if Jesus has come to *destroy* them; (2) Romans 14:15: Paul warns the "stronger" believers not to *destroy* (by careless use of their freedom) a "weaker" fellow-believer; and (3) James 4:12: God is the lawgiver able to save/deliver or *destroy*. Here, too, a sense of rejection—and in two of these a *judicial* rejection at that—is involved.

Indeed, the active verb is *especially* suited for the action of someone in *authority*, whether a king, Jesus, God, Pilate, the Jewish Sanhedrin, or others. (Romans 14:15 is almost the only exception.) Even when Noah's flood or Sodom's fire and brimstone are depicted as the agents of such destruction, in Luke 17:27, 29, God is only thinly veiled behind the scene. By such decisions persons destroyed are judicially banished, removed from the scene.

We should also examine the usage of this verb in the passive voice. Often translated *perish*, *be lost*, the passive of this verb focuses on the condition that results from the active agency of the person responsible. Those who *perish* are, simply, the ones *destroyed*. As with the active, the passive often refers simply to those who have been killed and are therefore removed from the scene of human life. These instances do not help us in determining the meaning of "destroy body and soul in Gehenna." But there is a class of passages scattered throughout the New Testament that uses this passive verb of spiritual lostness, and these bear directly on eternal destruction. These we should examine more closely.

It may be that the idea of spiritual lostness grew logically out of the experience of things lost. Thus in the parables of Luke 15 we encounter a lost coin, a lost sheep, and a lost son. Already we learn that this lostness, this "destruction," does not mean annihilation: all three are found. And there is but a short step from that to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," to which Jesus referred at least twice (Matthew 10:6; 15:24). These, too, though lost, may be "found": Jesus has been sent to them and sends his disciples to them. Indeed, Jesus has come to seek and save "the lost" (Matthew 18:11; Luke 19:10). The spiritual element is now clear.

This leads directly to the classification of all who are not repentant toward God as "the lost," "the perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:10). In all such passages there is sharp contrast, either explicit or implicit, between "the ones perishing" and "the ones saved."

I conclude, therefore, that there is nothing about the expression, unique in the Gehenna passages, "destroy in Gehenna" which suggests that annihilation is the meaning of destruction. Death, yes; "doing away with," yes—in the sense of banishment as the result of a judicial sentence; final, spiritual lostness from God, yes; the eternal sealing of a perishing that is already true, yes. To "destroy in Gehenna," therefore, in no way implies annihilation.<sup>39</sup>

#### PASSAGES WHERE WORDS EQUIVALENT TO PLACE-NAMES ARE USED

For the New Testament teaching on hell, we need more than the two words surveyed thus far. There are instances in the New Testament where, although neither Hades nor Gehenna is used, a title equivalent to a place-name for hell appears or is implied.

#### *Tartarus*

Just once is the existence of this place-name indicated, though indirectly, in the New Testament. This is 2 Peter 2:4, where the word is not the noun but the verb *tartaroo*, which means to *hold captive in* or *cast into Tartarus*. This place, of Greek origin, was "thought of by the Greeks as a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine punishment was meted out," apparently thought of in the same terms "in Jewish apocalyptic as well."<sup>40</sup>

This singular passage does not add much to our survey of the idea of hell in the New Testament. Peter's usage contains just one additional idea: that it is a place where at least some sinning angels have been committed to await judgment. Peter describes them as bound with "chains of darkness";<sup>41</sup> this introduces the concept of darkness into the New Testament picture of hell, as well as the idea that it is a prison. More attention will be given to these ideas subsequently.

We do not know as much as we would like about these "sinning angels." Jude 6 is clearly parallel, explaining that they "kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation." These God has kept "under darkness," with eternal bonds, for the judgment of the great day. Again, the concepts of darkness and imprisonment are found in both places.

39. For a helpful treatment of this issue, and of other arguments for annihilation, see Robert A. Peterson, "A Traditionalist Response to John Stott's Arguments for Annihilationism," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (December 1994):553-68.

40. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "*tartaroo*."

41. Some manuscripts have *sirois*, *in pits*, instead of *seirais*, *with chains*, but the current critical text agrees with the Majority Text and TR.

Without spending additional time on this passage, I observe in passing that the special linking between hell and fallen angels may also be the basis for “prepared for the devil and his angels” in Matthew 25:41. We will also see below that the Revelation speaks clearly (and with finality) of this linking. Meanwhile, there is not enough here to settle whether Peter and Jude are referring to *all* the fallen angels or to some more limited portion of them.

### *The Lake of Fire*

This, too, is a place-name, but one of a different nature. The Greek phrase (*he limne tou puros*) is not a proper name (like Hades, Gehenna, or Tartarus) but a descriptive title, one that occurs only in the Revelation and there only five times in the closing chapters: 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8 (cf. 14:10).

In order, these verses tell us that, first, the beast and false prophet, then the devil, then Death and Hades, then all whose names are not found in the book of life at the final judgment, are cast into the Lake of Fire. In each case, this is obviously meant to depict the final disposition of the persons named. Insofar as human beings are involved, the last reference (21:8) apparently restates the facts already made clear when Death and Hades (meaning the population thereof), including all whose names are not in the Lamb’s book, are cast into the Lake of Fire. These are therefore all who do *not* “overcome” and include the “cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars” (NKJV)—all the wicked, in other words.

While these references do not add startling new information about the New Testament picture of hell, they do provide some helpful and confirming details. For one thing, the element of fire is especially in focus, not only because the place is descriptively characterized as a “lake of fire” (or “fiery lake,” if the genitive is qualitative) but also because of the added phrase “burning with brimstone” (19:20; cf. 20:10; 21:8). The phrase indicates that the fire is ignited or fueled with brimstone—sulfur in contemporary terms. In 20:10 it is a lake “of fire and sulfur”; in 21:8, a lake “burning with fire and sulfur.” All three expressions convey essentially the same idea of a molten sea of burning sulfur.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, the element of torment is clearly indicated in 20:10: “They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” The verb is cognate to the noun used of the rich man’s misery in Hades in Luke 16:23 and 28, translated *torture*, *torment*. More important is the fact that the

42. In Luke 17:29 Jesus represents the destruction of Sodom as by the same elements.

phrase *forever and ever* modifies the verb; the torment of these two, specifically, is thus meant to be perceived as continuing without end. That would certainly seem to eliminate the possibility of annihilation for them. At the same time, the fact that the wicked are described as sharing their fate at least implies that their torment will likewise be unending.

Although Revelation 14:10 does not use the word *lake*, the verbal phrase "tormented with fire and brimstone" shows that the same place of final destiny is being discussed. In this instance those who worship "the beast" or receive his mark are described as sharing the eternal destiny of the beast himself. In words intentionally and nearly identical with those of 20:10 we are told that "the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever, and they have no rest day and night" (v. 11). Explicitly, then, the torment of those who worship the beast is as everlasting as that of the beast and false prophet. Again, then, there is clearly no annihilation. Add to this that they are tormented "in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (v. 10). The linking of this with the words of v. 11, just noted, clearly implies that as long as the Lamb and the holy angels live, this torment will continue.

One further attribute of this Lake of Fire is indicated here: that it is a manifestation of the wrath of God (v. 10). It will become clear, below, that the biblical view of hell is precisely this. All through the New Testament the wrath of God is representative of the final destiny of the wicked from which our Savior delivers us (1 Thessalonians 1:10, for example).

In passing I would certainly acknowledge the possibility, as assumed by many interpreters, that the Lake of Fire represents the very same "place" as Gehenna. And the fact that the population of Hades is ultimately emptied into the Lake of Fire appears to suggest that the key difference between the two is that the one is temporary and present, the other permanent and ultimate. All the same, I think it is too much to suggest that John would have thought of the word *Gehenna*, here; as already indicated, what we learn here in the Revelation may well be an advance on what the rest of the New Testament had already indicated.

### *The Abyss*

It may be debatable whether this essentially proper name (Greek, *he abussos*, originally an adjective) is meant to be taken as yet another name for hell. The word occurs nine times in the New Testament, all but two of them in the Revelation, where it is the word we are used to seeing as *the bottomless pit*. Arndt and Gingrich suggest *depth* or *underworld* as its meaning, indicating that it is the abode of the dead (Romans 10:7), of demons (Luke 8:31), of the devil's imprisonment (Revelation 20:3), of the "beast"

or Antichrist (Revelation 11:7; 17:8), and of Abaddon, the "angel" of the underworld (Revelation 9:11).<sup>43</sup>

The *abyss* is altogether linked in the New Testament with the demonic element.<sup>44</sup> The demons possessing the demoniac in Gadara/Gerasa did not want Jesus to commit them to the abyss (Luke 8:31). In the visions of the Apocalypse, infernal "locusts" come from the abyss to torment the wicked on earth (Revelation 9:1), being under the direction of King Abaddon/Apollyon ("Destroyer"), likewise the "angel" of the abyss (Revelation 9:11). The "beast" who overcomes the two witnesses, and on whose back the "woman" known as Babylon, mother of harlots, rides, comes up from the abyss (Revelation 11:7; 17:8). And Satan himself is bound in the abyss for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1, 3).

By way of analysis, we note first that the phrasing in Revelation 9:1 is, literally, "the well/pit/shaft of the abyss" (Greek, *to phrear tes abussos*). A *phrear* is often, specifically (as in John 4:11-12), a shaft dug as a well, but can be any kind of dug shaft or pit, here possibly one "leading down into the depths of hell."<sup>45</sup> But this view assumes that the genitive is local or partitive; more likely, it seems to me, the genitive is appositional: "the pit otherwise known as the abyss." This view, I think, is supported by the grammatical evidence: after being twice identified as "the pit of the abyss," in vv. 1 and 2, thereafter the place is simply "the pit" (*phrear*, twice more in v. 2) and then "the abyss" (11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3). In other words, then, the abyss itself is a deep pit.

We note, next, that the abyss is associated with darkness, reflected in its nature as a deep pit where there is no light. Furthermore, in Revelation 9:1, from this abyss comes smoke that darkens the sun and air, and out of this darkening smoke come infernal "locusts" to hurt the wicked on earth. Regardless how figuratively these symbols should be interpreted, the idea of the abyss as a place of dismal darkness and source of demonic forces seems clear.

In addition, it is clear that the abyss can be locked. In Revelation 9 an angel with a key to the abyss opens it and releases the infernal locusts. In 20:1-3 that same angel locks Satan in the abyss for the thousand years mentioned there. This characteristic of the abyss is apparently meant to suggest that it has the nature of a prison where demonic forces are bound

43. Arndt and Gingrich, s.v. "*abussos*."

44. Except for Romans 10:7, where Paul is citing Deuteronomy 30:13 and *the abyss* appears to represent the depths of the sea (cf. Psalm 107:26)—but even so with implications for the abode of the dead, as Paul himself interprets.

45. Arndt and Gingrich, s.v. "*phrear*."

or released at God's bidding. The dread of the demons in Luke 8:31 is appropriate, given this notion.

Finally, we note in Revelation 17:8 the interesting statement that "the beast . . . will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition" (NKJV). When we explore the meaning of *perdition* below, we will see that it too is a way of characterizing the eternal destiny of those apart from God. This distinction between "the abyss" and "perdition," then—if it is that—would seem to mean that they are not interchangeable names for one and the same place. In that case, the abyss is not precisely a name for the final place of torment for the wicked, not quite the same as the Lake of Fire.

Without any additional sources to go on, therefore, I would tender that the New Testament concept of the abyss is as a more or less temporary prison, especially for Satan and other demonic beings.<sup>46</sup> If that is the case, it may provide for these superhuman beings what Hades provides for human beings. Of the other names I have examined, it seems most like *Tartarus*. Regardless, the abyss, like Hades, will ultimately give way to *perdition*, which can be equated to the Lake of Fire, effectively the same as Gehenna.

#### CHARACTERIZATIONS OF HELL ACCORDING TO CONDITION

A survey of New Testament teaching on hell would not be complete without treating those instances when the situation of the wicked after death is represented according to the *condition* they are in rather than by identifying a *place*. Indeed, some of these expressions get very close to being used as substitutes for place-names.<sup>47</sup> The most common and significant of these are briefly treated in the following paragraphs.

1. *Fire*, which appears with or without additional modifiers. Our study of both Hades and Gehenna, above, yielded an often-stated linking with fire, not to mention the final Lake of Fire. It is natural, then, that the New Testament will at times refer to the destiny of the wicked simply as *fire*, without naming the place. Among the most helpful of these are:

- Matthew 3:12 (Luke 3:17): the coming Messiah, according to John, will burn the chaff (representing the wicked) with *unquenchable fire*.

46. Bietenhard agrees in thinking of the abyss as "the prison for demons."

47. We do this in English. We may speak of a person as being "in torment," for example, rather than saying "in hell."



- Matthew 13:42, 50: at the end of the age the Son of Man (the angels) will gather the lawless (the wicked) and cast them into *the furnace of fire*.
- Matthew 18:8 (Mark 9:43): *the everlasting fire (the fire that shall never be quenched)*, paralleled in the next verse by "the Gehenna of fire."
- Matthew 25:41: At the judgment the Son of Man will commit those on his left to "*the everlasting fire* prepared for the devil and his angels."
- 2 Thessalonians 1:8: At his revelation Christ will take vengeance on the wicked in *flaming fire*.

The first two of these are somewhat parabolic. Even so, the idea of fire for the wicked breaks through the otherwise parabolic nature of what is said.

2. *Outer darkness*. This phrase occurs three times in Matthew: 8:12; 22:13; 25:30. All three are linked with the observation, "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," which results when some are cast into this outer darkness. The last two are in parabolic contexts, but the first is at least not as clearly so. In light of the first of these, and of the fact that elements of spiritual reality often tend to break through any given parabolic framework, it seems likely that this is intended to be a characterization of the final condition of the wicked. Closely related is the usage of the simple word *darkness* in 2 Peter 2:4, 17 and Jude 6 and 13, already touched on above.

3. Greek *apoleia*, rendered by various English words like *destruction*, *perdition*, and *damnation* (also the verb *apollumi* with the meaning *perish*).

- Matthew 7:13: "Broad is the way that leads to *destruction*."
- Romans 9:22: "Vessels of wrath fitted for *destruction*."
- Philippians 3:19: "Whose end is *destruction*."
- John 17:12: "None of them is lost but the son of *perdition*."
- Philippians 1:28: Hostility against the saints is "a proof of *perdition*" of those who are hostile.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:3: The man of sin is "the son of *perdition*."
- 1 Timothy 6:9: "Lusts which drown men in *destruction* and *perdition*."
- Hebrews 10:39: "We are not of those who draw back to *perdition*."
- 2 Peter 3:7: "Of judgment and *perdition* of ungodly men."

- Revelation 17:8, 11: The beast ascends from the abyss and goes "to *perdition*." (See above.)
- 2 Peter 2:3: "Their *damnation* slumbers not."  
Cf. 2 Peter 2:1-2: (literally) "heresies of *damnation*," "ways of *damnation*."

This noun is cognate to the verb *apollumi*, which has already been treated above where it was noted that one of the ideas linked closely with Gehenna is the idea of *destruction*. The verb suggests ruin or loss and focuses on the perspective of the one experiencing this condition. Among many instances when this verb is rendered *perish* and refers clearly to the eternal destiny of the wicked is 1 Corinthians 15:18: "If Christ is not risen . . . then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have *perished*." See also Luke 9:25; 13:3, 5; Romans 2:12; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 8:11; 2 Corinthians 2:15.

One will note that in almost all of these uses of the noun, "hell" might be substituted without really changing the meaning. People in hell are in a state of final (and thus hopeless) ruin, devastation, lostness. They have perished.

4. Greek *olethros*, a near synonym of the preceding also often translated *destruction*.

- 2 Thessalonians 1:9: "These [who do not know God or obey the gospel] shall be punished with everlasting *destruction* from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes in that Day."
- 1 Timothy 6:9: "Lusts which drown men in *destruction* [*olethros*] and perdition [*apoleia*, as above]."

See also 1 Thessalonians 5:3 and 1 Corinthians 5:5, the only other places in the New Testament where this word occurs. Of the two near synonyms, it seems that *apoleia*, being more common, can be used more broadly to refer to either physical or spiritual destruction, temporary or permanent. *Olethros*, however, seems always to refer to final, eternal, spiritual ruin. That this appears to be so, however, may result from its limited usage rather than the semantic range of the words themselves.

5. Greek *krisis*, variously translated *condemnation*, *judgment*, or *damnation*.

- Mark 3:29: The one blaspheming the Holy Spirit will be held liable to "eternal *damnation*."<sup>48</sup>

48. The critical text reads "eternal sin," but the meaning is still judgment/condemnation for sin.

- John 5:29: Those practicing evil things will go forth "to the resurrection of *damnation*."
- Hebrews 10:27: Apostates have only "a certain fearful expectation of *judgment* and fiery indignation."

This word clearly represents the final state of the wicked from the perspective of the judgment of God. They have been judicially sentenced to this destiny, as we have already seen in other analyses above.

6. *Wrath* (Greek *orge*), in various phrases.
  - John 3:36 (in contrast to "everlasting life"): "The *wrath* of God abides on him."
  - Romans 2:5, 8: The impenitent (Jews?) are treasuring up for themselves "*wrath* in the day of *wrath* and revelation of the righteous judgment of God": namely, "for those who do not obey the truth . . . , *wrath* and anger."
  - Romans 9:22: "Vessels of *wrath* fashioned for destruction" (see *apoleia* above).
  - Colossians 3:6: "The *wrath* of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience."
  - 1 Thessalonians 1:10: "Jesus, our Deliverer from the *wrath* to come."
  - 1 Thessalonians 5:9: "For God did not appoint us to *wrath* but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."
  - Revelation 11:18: "The nations were angry, and Your *wrath* has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged." (See also Revelation 6:16; 16:19; 19:15; etc.)

It is clear that "the wrath of God," "the wrath to come," and similar expressions are meant to convey the idea of the final destiny of unbelievers under the judgment of God. Both the notion of God's judicial decision, as in the preceding, and the idea of punishment for offence against him, are involved. I may add that John 3:36, by placing a "wrath that abides" in juxtaposition to eternal life, certainly implies that the wrath is *experienced* forever.

7. Finally, *death*. Paul is the New Testament writer who most uses the unmodified word *death* to characterize the final state of the wicked. (James 5:20 may also do so.) Probably the most direct statement is in Romans 6:23, with its clear contrast to the final state of the righteous: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." See also Romans 1:32; 5:21; 6:16, 21; 7:5; 8:6; 2 Corinthians 2:16; etc.

One hardly needs to prove that the word by itself does not even primarily, much less necessarily, mean cessation of existence or annihilation. There are too many ways the word is used to allow us to think that way. That people without Christ are already spiritually dead, by itself, makes clear that death does not eliminate continued existence. The account of Lazarus and the rich man, examined above, likewise makes this clear: both are very active after their death. The fact that death and Hades are finally cast into the Lake of Fire most certainly refers to the existing population of death and Hades.

In the New Testament, then, the use of "death" as a way of characterizing the eternal state of the wicked is easy to understand. It means death unrelieved by redemption. It is, in fact, an eternal death that is the very opposite of eternal life, a final and irremediable separation from God and every joy and good. It is death characterized by all the rest of the conditions outlined in the preceding.

#### DID JESUS DESCEND TO OR CHANGE HELL?

Just before final conclusions, I turn now to a collateral question. Some hold that the nature of hell was changed at the time of the death and resurrection of Christ. That view, in summary, goes something like this. Before his redemptive work, all who died went to Hades, itself divided into two compartments (as pictured in the account of the rich man and Lazarus) separated by "a great gulf fixed" (Luke 16:26). The reason for this, apparently, is that the redemptive work of Christ was not yet finished. But when Christ arose, he emptied that side of Hades where the godly were in Abraham's bosom and took them to Paradise to be with him—the place to which all the saved now go when they die. At that point, the side occupied by the rich man was expanded to fill the whole; from then on, therefore, Hades has been occupied only by the lost, who go there immediately after death.

It is difficult to be sure exactly what the *basis* of this view is. Even so, there are two New Testament passages that bear upon it and have been used to support the view. I turn brief attention, therefore, to those passages.

1. Ephesians 4:8-10 tells us that when Christ "ascended on high" he "led captivity captive." Paul goes on to explain the "ascended" as being possible only because he "first descended into the lower parts of the earth." Those who hold the view I have outlined above understand "the lower parts of the earth" to refer to Hades. They consequently see Christ's

descent into Hades as being for the purpose of removing the righteous from there, indicated by the "led captivity captive."

For various reasons I can not accept this understanding of the passage, more because I am satisfied it means something else than because I object to the idea that Hades was changed by the death and resurrection of Christ.

First is the clause "led captivity captive." Verse 8 is, specifically, a quotation of Psalm 68:18. In order to understand it, one must grasp that it is Hebrew poetry. It occurs elsewhere in Old Testament poetical settings, as in the song of Deborah and Barak where we read, "Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive" (Judges 8:12). The Hebrew language makes frequent use of repetitive words for emphasis; thus "falling, he fell" might mean "he fell hard," for example. It should be immediately clear that the wording does not mean taking a group of captives from one place of captivity to another. Instead, it describes such a victory that the *enemy* is vanquished and taken into captivity. The poetic state depicted is of a parade of vanquished captives being led away in triumph by the conqueror. In Ephesians the poetry describes the victory of Jesus over all the vanquished forces of evil—nothing more, nothing less.

Second is the phrase "the lower parts of the earth." Those who think that Jesus changed Hades understand this to mean lower parts down in the earth—the underworld, that is. In other words, they take the genitive *the earth* to be a local or partitive genitive. Instead, the genitive should be taken as appositional; this way, the "earth" is the name of "the lower parts." We might accurately translate, "the lower parts known as the earth." The earth to which Jesus descended is the lower parts as compared to the heaven from which he came and to which he ascended in victory.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the expression "the lower parts of the earth" also reflects Old Testament usage. The same words, or words essentially the same, appear in the Old Testament to indicate three different things: (1) the womb, as in Psalm 139:15; (2) the grave or death, as in Psalm 63:9; Ezekiel 26:20; and (3) the earth itself, as in Isaiah 44:23. This last is especially instructive, given that the phrase stands in direct contrast (as here in Ephesians) to the heavens.

49. We use the same kind of construction in English: "the city of Nashville," for example; it is even more common in Greek than in English. Consider "the breastplate of (= which is) righteousness" (Ephesians 6:14); "the earnest of (= who is) the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 1:22); "the washing of (= otherwise known as) regeneration" (Titus 3:5); "the foolishness of (= which is) preaching" (1 Corinthians 1:21); "the temple of (= otherwise to be identified as) his body" (John 2:21). See A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 498-99.

Regardless which of the three Old Testament meanings one should attach to Ephesians 4:9, the meaning will not be that Christ descended into hell for some activity within the realm of the underworld. If the meaning is the womb, then the reference is to the incarnation, and the result is the same as I am suggesting. If the meaning is the grave, then the reference is to Christ's death and burial, not to a descent into hell. And if the meaning is the earth itself, the meaning I feel confident is the correct one, then the contrast is between earth and heaven. I may add that the contrast is between earth as the site of Jesus' *humiliation* and heaven as the site of his *exaltation*.

Indeed, then, it seems clear that Ephesians 4:8-10 is referring directly to the same thing that Jesus himself said in John 3:13: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." Paul is echoing this affirmation, emphasizing that the Jesus who mounted up to heaven as victor, leading as it were his vanquished enemies in captivity before him, is the same as the one who had first come down in humiliation to these lower parts known as earth. (Indeed, in submitting to human birth and to death and burial, he "descended" to the lowest, most humiliating manifestations of life on earth.)

We have seen, then, that neither the clause "he led captivity captive" nor the phrase "the lower parts of the earth" provides any reason to think Paul is referring to Hades.<sup>50</sup> The only other possible reason for considering a change in the situation of the dead (at the time of Jesus' death and resurrection) might be the lesson on the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. That would be true, however, *only* if Lazarus was in Hades. I have already indicated that I think that is most unlikely.

Space does not permit further exploration of this passage. It is enough to observe, then, that Ephesians 4:8-10 does not bear on the subject of hell in the New Testament. It has nothing to say to us about hell. If Jesus made changes in Hades in connection with his redemptive work, this passage does not provide any support for that.

2. The other passage of interest is 1 Peter 3:18-20, where we read that Jesus "went and preached to the spirits in prison." While this does not suggest any change in the situation of the (wicked) dead at the time of Jesus' death, it does raise the possibility that for some reason he went into the underworld between his death and resurrection for some sort of

50. See also my commentary on Ephesians in *The Randall House Bible Commentary / Galatians through Colossians* (Nashville: Randall House Publications, 1988), 196-97.

proclamation activity. The question, then, is: Did Jesus "descend into hell"?

I have dealt in detail with this very difficult passage elsewhere.<sup>51</sup> Without rehearsing the issues here, I am still of the view that the passage most likely means that in his spirit (or by the Holy Spirit) Jesus had preached, through Noah, to the people of Noah's day. These people, who met God's longsuffering with their own rebellious disobedience, are now "spirits in prison": that is, they are now in hell. According to this view, the passage does not mean that Jesus "descended into hell" after his death.

As I also indicated, a second view seems a lesser possibility: namely, that Jesus between his death and resurrection did descend to, or pass through, the underworld to make proclamation of his victory over its evil forces. If this is the correct view, then the idea that Jesus descended into hell is valid. The "preaching" he did there, however, was not preaching of the gospel in order to provide opportunity for repentance, but proclamation of victory over hell and death. If we should ask why Jesus should make such obvious proclamation, the answer might well be that it served as a dramatic demonstration of his triumph and ascension in exaltation. As R. C. H. Lenski expresses this view, "Christ . . . went there in the instant of his vivification after his death and made a proclamation to *the damned* in hell. . . . The descent and the ascent with its eternal enthronement belong together."<sup>52</sup>

I should note, in passing, that I have no sympathy for the view that anyone is ever offered the gospel after death. Nor does it seem possible that, in the days preceding the flood, angels intermarried with human beings and produced some kind of extraordinary offspring. Both of these bizarre views are often associated with the interpretation of this passage.

To return to the basic question: Did Jesus descend into hell at some point immediately or shortly after his death? It is possible (though I lean more to the other interpretation, as noted above) that 1 Peter 3:18-20 provides a basis for this. The Apostles' Creed, a traditional formulation of Christian doctrine that has been recited for hundreds of years in many churches, includes the affirmation that he descended into hell. If this passage does not teach the doctrine, there is probably no other New Testament support for it; if it does, there is adequate support. Consequently, whether the clause ought to remain in the Apostles' Creed

51. See my commentary on 1 and 2 Peter in *The Randall House Bible Commentary / James, 1, 2 Peter and Jude* (Nashville: Randall House Publications, 1992), 178-83.

52. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1945), 167-68.

has come to be a matter of debate. Wayne Grudem, a contemporary theologian, argues that it ought not to be retained. He points out that only in the version of Rufinus (A. D. 390) was it ever included earlier than A. D. 650 and that Rufinus understood it to mean that he was buried, taking "hell" in the sense of Hades as the equivalent of the Old Testament Sheol.<sup>53</sup> David Scaer took up the challenge and defended the traditional version of the creed, expressing again the view I have summarized above: "The crucifixion had rendered the netherworld impotent. Satan, death and hell were conquered not by an act of divine omnipotence but by Christ's atonement. The descent, the resurrection appearances, and the session at the right hand belong together as a unified proclamation of Christ's victory in the three different but related realms of hell, earth, and heaven."<sup>54</sup>

Again, limitations of space preclude further development. The conclusion, however, is clear. If 1 Peter 3:18-20 does not refer to Jesus' descent into hell following his death, it has no bearing on the subject of hell in the New Testament. If it does—and I think that this is the less likely possibility—we learn nothing especially new for our survey except that it belongs to the realm over which Christ has triumphed for his people. In that case, the "spirits in prison" are probably the supernatural spirits represented by Satan and demonic forces, and the idea that hell is a "prison" for them fits well with what we have seen earlier, especially in examining Tartarus and the abyss.

#### CONCLUSIONS

For the purposes of this paper, nothing remains now but to provide a very abbreviated summary of the New Testament teaching on hell, in outline form.

1. For hell (in its usual sense in English), the New Testament uses of Hades and Gehenna ultimately merge. This does not rule out the technical difference between Hades as temporary and Gehenna as final, but that particular distinction does not play a large role in the New Testament.

2. Hell is the destiny, after death, of those who have persisted in being unrepentant toward God. It therefore represents death in its most terrifying sense: death as the enemy of the human race, the death of the

53. Wayne Grudem, "He Did Not Descend into Hell: A Plea for Following Scripture instead of the Apostles' Creed," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (March 1991):110-11.

54. David P. Scaer, "He Did Descend to Hell: In Defense of the Apostles' Creed," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (March 1992):99.



unredeemed. It is the opposite, in every sense of the word, of heaven as the destiny of the redeemed.

3. Hell results from a judicial commitment by God.<sup>55</sup>

4. Hell is therefore a place of punishment, and the experience of that punishment is eternal. The instrument of torment is best understood as fire: finally a molten sea of fire.

5. Hell is likewise a place of imprisonment and punishment for the personal powers of supernatural evil: the devil and his angels.

6. Hell can therefore figuratively represent the forces and source of evil in the world: thus, the enemy of Christ and his church, though an enemy doomed to defeat.

7. To experience hell is to experience eternal night, hopeless lostness, the settled judgment and wrath of God, and everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord of life and light.

These seem to me to be assured results of exegesis of a broad range of New Testament passages.

55. For an interesting defense of the traditional doctrine of hell, see Bruce W. Davidson, "How Jonathan Edwards Argued for the Rationality of Hell," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (March 1995):47-55.

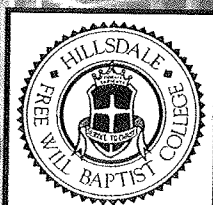
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# A Plea for Unabridged Christianity

## INTRODUCTION

When we use the words "abridged" or "unabridged," the first thing that comes to our minds is how those terms apply to the scope of various dictionaries. The concept of an unabridged dictionary furnishes us with a helpful analogy for launching a plea for unabridged Christianity.<sup>1</sup> An abridgment of Christianity represents more than a mere failure to attain an in-depth, comprehensive treatment of Christianity. It represents an intentional decision to omit treatments of certain areas of Christian thought because they are not considered to be essential for the promotion and spread of the gospel. Other areas are neglected because they are considered unimportant or irrelevant.

Though I make a plea for it, I realize that none of us will ever achieve the goal of unabridged Christianity. We will never achieve an unabridged understanding of the scope and depth of Christianity. Also, we will never have an unabridged experience of all that it means to be a Christian. Other possible titles include "Toward Unabridged Christianity," or "Toward a Comprehensive View of Christianity."

I used to waste a great deal of time trying to set and reach impossible goals. For the most part, I have backed off from that. I am learning to be realistic. However, in this instance I want to be a part of a move to make unabridged Christianity our goal.

## HOW WE ARRIVED AT WHERE WE ARE

Throughout its history the church has always fallen short of developing a comprehensive view of Christian thought. Controversy focuses on special needs and concerns and tends to draw the church's attention

1. Some of the material used in this paper is taken from my book *The Quest for Truth: Answering Life's Inescapable Questions* (Nashville: Randall House Publications, 2001). The material that is used is taken from Chapter 18, "Communicating the Christian Message in a Postmodern Culture." Since I am quoting myself, I take direct liberty in the way I use the material. Bits of it appear here and there in the paper rather than in simple straight quotations. I have used the freedom to revise the wording when it suits my purposes in this paper.

away from other important truth. The Protestant Reformation focused so much on the doctrine of justification that the emphasis on sanctification suffered. It seems that we have never been able to discover how we can be advocates of a sound view of grace and at the same time insist that a changed life is an integral part of the experience of grace. It has always been the experience of the church that while dealing with the need at hand we find ourselves neglecting other important truths.

While it may be true that there has always been a failure to give a full development of Christian thought, it seems that in recent years this problem has taken a different turn and become much more acute. There has apparently been a *studied* attempt to write off whole areas of Christian thought as being unimportant or irrelevant.

It is hard to be precise in giving a chronology of how all this has taken place. However, I will make a few observations. During the Fundamentalist-Liberal Controversy and during the extended fallout from this controversy (1900-1950<sup>2</sup>), the focus was placed on the fundamentals of the faith. In this controversy, from a human viewpoint, the very existence of biblical Christianity was at stake. When commenting on Liberalism and Christianity, J. Gresham Machen declared, "Naturalistic liberalism is not Christianity at all."<sup>3</sup> He further commented, in referring to the decade of the 1920s, "The chief modern rival of Christianity is 'liberalism.' An examination of the teachings of liberalism in comparison with those of Christianity will show that at every point the two movements are in direct opposition."<sup>4</sup> In order to save Christianity, attention was focused on the inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth of Christ, his deity, his blood atonement, his bodily resurrection, and his bodily return. These doctrines were the dividing line between Liberalism and Fundamentalism and were so important that agreement on them formed a common bond that brought people together to fight the deadly enemy of Liberalism. When a person said that he agreed on the fundamentals of the faith, the Fundamentalist would extend his hand and say, "Shake, Brother." They were ready to join together in battle to fight the foe of

2. The dates 1900-1950 are not intended to be precise. But I think we can safely say that by 1900 the forces were already at work that resulted in the bitter conflict of the 1920s. My own memory of what was taking place in the decade of the 1940s tells me that the conservative church world was still being influenced by the fallout from the Fundamentalist-Liberal Controversy. By 1950, in the conservative church world, the infighting between Fundamentalists and Neo-evangelicals was beginning to occupy center stage.

3. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946), 52.

4. *Ibid.*, 53.

Liberalism. This created a heyday for interdenominationalism. There was a tendency to play down other differences.

During this time the volume was turned up on the fundamentals of the faith. In the conservative church world we were quick to doubt a person's salvation if he was unclear in his commitment even to one of these fundamentals. But there tended to be a quick acceptance of a person's salvation if he was ready to affirm them.

Along with an emphasis on the fundamentals of the faith, there was a new zeal for making it clear that we are saved by faith alone and not by faith plus works. I can remember that this emphasis had become very strong by the 1940s. This combination of an emphasis on the fundamentals of the faith and the new zeal for making it clear that we are saved by faith alone created an interest in the *minimum* that is required for salvation.

There was a new zeal for evangelism. Sermons were preached which emphasized that you do not have to be a member of a church or be baptized to be saved. The emphasis was strong that we are saved by faith alone. But thinking began to be blurred on the idea that a changed life is an integral part of salvation. During this time the popular brand of "once saved, always saved" gained great popularity.<sup>5</sup>

John R. Rice, the founding editor of *The Sword of the Lord*, in an article by the title "Preachers Pervert Plan of Salvation," offered a response

5. There is an important difference between what I call the popular view of "once saved, always saved" and classical Calvinism's corresponding view. Classical Calvinists insisted on the perseverance of the believer in faith and holiness. This conclusion is the logical outgrowth of their view of unconditional election.

Those who set forth the popular view have tended to believe in conditional election. The logic of their view was an outgrowth of their understanding of atonement and its application of the benefits of atonement in justification. They believed that the imputation of the death and righteousness of Christ to the believer made it impossible that such a person could possibly forfeit his salvation no matter what he might ever do.

As a rule, the classical Calvinists, with regard to free will, believe in the liberty of spontaneity rather than the liberty of indifference. The liberty of spontaneity is considered compatible with determinism. The will is free in that a person does what he or she desires to do. But since it is God who determines what the decision is, the decision could not have been different. God has determined that the believer will persevere in faith and holiness.

Those who believe in the popular view tend to believe in the liberty of indifference. In this view, freedom of will means that in a given situation the person could have chosen differently. This view is usually considered incompatible with determinism. Since those who believe in the popular view believe in freedom of choice, this leaves open the possibility that after a person is saved he or she could be involved in almost any imaginable sin. But the nature of atonement and its application in justification eliminates the possibility that such a person could ever forfeit his or her salvation. On the meaning of the phrases "liberty of spontaneity" and "liberty of indifference," see my book *The Quest for Truth*, pp. 315-16. On classical Calvinism's view of "once saved always saved" and the corresponding popular view, see pp. 269-76.

to a concern about cheap easy-believism. In a very forthright explanation he commented:

Anyone who trusted in Christ for salvation was saved immediately. He was saved whether his outward life proved it or not. He was saved whether he has full assurance of salvation or not. He is saved, even if, like Peter says, ". . . he hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (2 Peter 1:9).

One who has thus trusted in Christ for salvation is saved, even if, like Noah and Lot, he gets drunk. They should not have become drunk, but that did not change the fact that they were born again, saved people. One who thus comes to Christ for forgiveness is saved, even if he falls into temptation and curses like Peter did, even if he denies his salvation like Peter did. One who has turned his heart from sin and relied on Christ for salvation is saved, even if he falls into adultery and murder, as David did.<sup>6</sup>

Some of those who advocated this approach to eternal security held very high standards for themselves and preached hard to get others to live by them. Rice was one of these. But, at the same time, they were ready to offer assurance of salvation that could not be forfeited to many who showed no real signs of a Christian commitment. Cheap easy-believism had its foot in the door.

The emphasis on the fundamentals of the faith tended to draw attention away from other areas of thought. The emphasis on the minimum that is required for evangelism caused many to label doctrines that were not a part of this minimum as being nonessential. The die was cast. The direction was set. A seemingly deliberate abridgment of Christianity began to develop. When the numbing influence of Postmodernism was added to what was already taking place, the abridgment became even more drastic. Minimum Christianity and low demand Christianity gained momentum.

#### THE DELIBERATE ABRIDGEMENT OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Let me illustrate what has happened in this wholesale abridgment. Eschatology is considered an easy doctrine to write off. Since a person can be saved and be wrong on his eschatology or have no opinion other than that Jesus is coming again, it is no big problem to omit it altogether.

6. John R. Rice, "Preachers Pervert Plan of Salvation," *The Sword of the Lord* 43 (January 21, 1977):16.

There are even gains to leaving it off, it is thought, since it tends to be divisive. By omitting it, we promote unity.

Significant developments of Arminianism or Calvinism are nearly nonexistent on the local church level. The emphasis on generic Christianity makes it so a person can go from a church that is denominationally Arminian to one that is denominationally Calvinistic or vice versa and hardly recognize the difference. This may on the surface look like a good thing. After all, it contributes to unity, and it helps us reach more people.

On the local church level the tendency is to present Christian truth in bits and pieces. The term "Sunday school" is a synonym for that which is shallow. It is very rare that a person is aided in a local church in developing an in-depth or an overall or a systematic or a comprehensive view of the Christian faith.

As this abridgment continues, we look at its fruits, and questions come to our minds: "What has happened to preaching on hell? What has happened to preaching on the wrath of God? What has happened to preaching on repentance? What has happened to preaching that warns people about sin, judgment, and wrath?"<sup>7</sup> These are almost dead issues among us.

How much use is made in preaching of passages that are hard on sin? Are we on the same page with Paul in our preaching when he says:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21)?<sup>8</sup>

Are we really sure that "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"? The lack of preaching on passages like this is not just a blight on churches that teach once saved, always saved. Arminians are not doing much, if any, better. What has happened to preaching under the anointing power of the Holy Spirit that tells sinners, "You must be born again" (John 3:7)? What has happened to preaching under the anointing power of God that tells church people, "Therefore, if

7. I would suggest that you take a complete concordance and look up the word "warn."

8. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17)? Am I imagining that there has been a toning down in these areas in recent years?

When it comes to the ideals of beauty and excellence, on the part of many, there has been a deliberate attempt to go with the flow of the culture. The concept of propriety has been almost pushed out the door. Barbarism meets with little opposition. In fact, it is encouraged. All of this has happened as our culture has come under the influence of Postmodernism. It is thought that we can reach more people with the gospel if we tailor our services and our lifestyles to allow about anything that is not a direct violation of the moral laws of the Ten Commandments. A college professor called to my attention that one of his students said that he thought we should live as much like the world as possible without violating the Ten Commandments. His point was, "We need to identify with the culture as much as we can. That will increase our effectiveness in reaching more people."

My list of abridgments is abridged. I think, however, I have said enough to show that a serious abridgment is underway.

#### THE ADMONITION OF C. S. LEWIS

It will come as a surprise to most people to learn that C. S. Lewis cautioned his readers not to be satisfied with "mere Christianity." Lewis seemed to foresee that some might read *Mere Christianity* and settle for that without moving on to greater heights and depths. Therefore, he gave the following words of caution to his readers:

I hope no reader will suppose that "mere" Christianity is here put forward as an alternative to the creeds of existing communions—as if a man could adopt it in preference to Congregationalism or Greek Orthodoxy or anything else. It is more like a hall out of which doors open into several rooms. If I can bring anyone into that hall I shall have done what I have attempted. But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals. The hall is a place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, not a place to live in. For that purpose the worst of the rooms (whichever that may be) is, I think, preferable. It is true that some people may find they have to wait in the hall for a considerable time, while others feel certain almost at once which door they must knock at. I do not know why there is this difference, but I am sure God keeps no one waiting unless He sees that it is good for him to wait. When



you do get into your room you will find that the long wait has done you some kind of good which you would not have had otherwise. But you must regard it as waiting, not as camping. You must keep on praying for light: and, of course, even in the hall, you must begin trying to obey the rules which are common to the whole house. And above all you must be asking which door is the *true* one; not which pleases you best by its paint and panelling. In plain language, the question should never be: "Do I like that kind of service?" but "Are these doctrines *true*: Is holiness here? Does my conscience move me towards this? Is my reluctance to knock at this door due to my pride, or my mere taste, or my personal dislike of this particular door-keeper?"

It is amazing that C. S. Lewis could write something over fifty years ago that so precisely addresses the church world of today.

#### EVALUATIVE COMMENTS

*This abridged or truncated approach to Christianity has been one of the greatest contributing factors to a weakening of Christianity.* Except for a few isolated instances, a number of Christian doctrines have been written off. This is true at least so far as the local church is concerned. Educational institutions also are not altogether exempt from this charge. Let us look at what this is costing us.

#### *The Loss That Comes from a Lack of Teaching on Eschatology*

One of our greatest needs, as human beings, is the need to know our roots. Our minds and hearts cry out for a knowledge of our roots. Think of the millions of hours and the billions of dollars that have been spent trying to build a scientific case for naturalistic evolution. Why do people do that? They are driven by a longing to know their roots.

I am afraid that we do not know the value of what we as Christians have. We have the answer to our origin as human beings. Most of us never hungered enough trying to determine the origin of the human race to experience the deep satisfaction that should be ours by knowing that we are created by God in his image. It has come to us as a given in the Bible. Knowing who you are goes far beyond the simple settling of a theological issue. It satisfies a deep longing within.

Think about the hours and the money that are being spent on genealogical studies. If you are not into this, you may say, "It doesn't

9. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1952), xi-xii. Italics added.

make sense for people to spend so much time and money trying to establish their genealogical roots." That attitude fails to take into account that God has placed a longing in our hearts to know our roots. It is not my desire to stir any pain in people who have put children up for adoption or in those who have been adopted. But if you know anything about people who have been adopted, you know how many of them are driven with an unquenchable longing to know who their birth parents are.

Just as people have a longing to know the origin of the human race and a longing to know their genealogical roots, Christians have a longing to know their spiritual roots. You may feel like asking, "What does eschatology have to do with understanding our spiritual roots?" It must be remembered that a view of eschatology embraces much more than a discussion of end events. It begins with Genesis 3:15 and shows how the drama of redemption is unfolded through the redemptive covenants. It goes from Genesis 3:15 to the eternal state.

When we are silent on eschatology, illiteracy prevails in the development of the drama of redemption. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David are usually used for character studies without showing the important place that they had in the unfolding of the drama of redemption. Illiteracy reigns when it comes to Israel and the redemptive covenants. The price that is paid for leaving off the treatment of eschatology is that people have no real grasp of their spiritual ancestry. This leaves an unfilled void in their hearts.

I believe that God has placed in our hearts a longing to know at least the basics of the unfolding drama of redemption. You may say, "I don't see much evidence of that hunger." My response is that there is a lot of hunger in the hearts of human beings that is being suppressed (Romans 1:18). But the suppression of that hunger does not erase it. If we are looking for it, we can occasionally see it manifest itself.

For example, I believe that God has designed into every human heart a hunger for knowing him. Solomon is addressing this hunger to know God when he says, "He [God] has also set eternity in their heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11, New American Standard Bible). Concerning these words, Franz Delitzsch explained:

It lies in his [man's] nature not to be contented with the temporal, but to break through the limits which it draws around him, to escape from the bondage and the disquietude within which

he is held, and amid the ceaseless changes of time to console himself by directing his thoughts to eternity.<sup>10</sup>

Augustine was speaking of this hunger when he said, "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee."<sup>11</sup>

*The Loss That Comes from a Failure to Give Developed Treatments of Arminianism and Calvinism*

When we omit the treatments of Arminianism and Calvinism, we promote illiteracy on some of the most important themes in the Bible—the sovereignty of God, predestination, election, depravity, free will, etc. When these doctrines are not dealt with, the result is a deprived Christian experience. It is hard to have any understanding of salvation without the implications of Calvinism and Arminianism working their way into our thinking and our discussions. We must give fully developed views on the areas of thought covered by Arminianism and Calvinism. We must learn to respect one another. We must be able to interact with one another and at the same time maintain a spirit of unity and fellowship. But we must not promote illiteracy in these areas as a way of maintaining unity.<sup>12</sup>

*The Loss That Comes from an Almost Silence on Judgment, Hell, and the Wrath of God*

In a day when feelings of guilt and fear of hell permeated the atmosphere about us, the results might not have been tragic if judgment, hell, and the wrath of God were neglected for a time in the pulpit. We could go on for a while on the benefit of the past without suffering a tragic loss. We are not living in that time now. We are fast approaching a time like that which existed in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. When Lot said to his sons-in-law, "Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!" the account in Genesis tells us, "But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking" (Genesis 19:14). The New English Bible renders

10. Franz Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, three vols. in one, vol. 6 of *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 261.

11. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Edward B. Pusey (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1961), 11.

12. This plea for Arminians and Calvinists to respect one another is made to the church world in general. I am not suggesting that denominations which are committed to either Calvinism or Arminianism should adopt an open policy. I am saying that those who are committed to a position should give full developments to their view. Arminians and Calvinists should be able to enter into forthright exchanges and to do so with respect for one another. To me this will produce a far healthier church world than agreeing to be silent as a means of attaining unity. To do otherwise is a costly abridgment of Christianity.

it: "But they did not take him seriously." We need to keep ourselves and our people reminded of the fact that if there is no judgment of God, if there is no wrath of God, if there is no hell, there is no Christianity. The central truth in Christianity is atonement. Let me cite here what I say in *The Quest for Truth: Answering Life's Inescapable Questions*:

Of all the events in the experience of Christ, His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His return, His death stands central. As important as the other events are both in themselves and in relation to His death, the death of Christ remains central because apart from atonement there would be no forgiveness of sins. Christianity would be non-existent. It is the birth that makes the death of Christ possible, but it is the death that makes the birth important. It is the resurrection that makes possible the application of the benefits of His death. It is the death that makes His resurrection important and makes the one who has been restored to life the Redeemer.<sup>13</sup>

If people were in need but were not guilty of sin before God, a case could be made for having an incarnation of deity to help them. But you cannot make a case for Jesus' dying on the cross if there is no price to be paid for people's sin. *The only reason that people need a Savior is that there is a holy God who holds people accountable for their sins and hell awaits them if they do not receive God's provision of atonement.*

*The Loss That Comes from a Lack of a Strong Emphasis on the Necessity of the New Birth and a Moral Transformation of All Who Are Saved*

It is nothing short of tragic what we are hearing about people who claim to be saved. Ben Haden tells about a single man and a single woman who were serving as teachers in a Bible college. They were involved in fornication. The students knew about it. So they confronted them about it. They said to them, "Don't you feel funny about this?" They said, "No, we just claim to be Christians. We don't claim to be disciples."

Sometime ago I was listening to some pastors as they were talking about problems that we are facing. One of them told about a couple who were living together without being married. Someone said to them, "I thought you were Christians." They said, "It is all under the blood." Another instance was cited where some young people were talking about getting drunk and having a wild party during the weekend. Someone

13. Forlines, *The Quest for Truth*, 183.

said to one of the girls, "I thought you were a Christian." She said, "I will ask forgiveness when it is over."

It might be easy to say, "These were probably rare cases." Or, one could say, "Stories get twisted as they are passed along from one person to another." Before we get too much comfort from such an assessment, let us note a report from Barna Research Online, February 12, 2002. A report on a recent forum said that

Barna noted that substantial numbers of Christians believe that activities such as abortion, gay sex, sexual fantasies, cohabitation, drunkenness and viewing pornography are morally acceptable. "Without some firm and compelling basis for suggesting that such acts are inappropriate, people are left with philosophies such as 'if it feels good, do it,' 'everyone else is doing it' or 'as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else, it's permissible.' In fact, the alarmingly fast decline of moral foundations among our young people has culminated in a one-word worldview: 'whatever.' The result is a mentality that esteems pluralism, relativism, tolerance, and diversity without critical reflection of the implications of particular views and actions. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

To help us see the critical nature of the challenge before the church, Barna goes on to say:

When a majority of Christian adults, including three out of four born again Baby Busters, as well as three out of four born again teens proudly cast their vote for moral relativism, the Church is in trouble. Continuing to preach more sermons, teach more Sunday school classes and enroll more people in Bible study groups won't solve the problem since most of these people don't accept the basis of the principles being taught in those venues. The failure to address this issue at its root, and to do so quickly and persuasively, will undermine the strength of the church for at least another generation, and probably longer.<sup>15</sup>

14. George Barna, "Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings," [on-line report], February 12, 2002, available from <http://www.barna.org/cgo-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=106&Reference=B>; Internet; accessed June 16, 2002.

15. *ibid.* It will be helpful if we understand how the term "born again" is used. The following explanation is given in the report: "Born again Christians" were defined in these surveys as people who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as "born again."

This information is disturbing! If there is any truth whatever in these claims, we should be outraged. It should bring us to our knees. What makes it even more disturbing is that at the same time that this tragedy has been taking place, people have spent more time in church singing praise to God for being holy than at any other time in the history of Christianity. Something is wrong! I do not believe that most of the people who are singing praises to God for being holy have any real understanding of what it means for God to be holy.

We hear over and over again that, according to the findings of surveys, there is no significant difference in the moral practices of Christians and non-Christians. As the Bible plainly teaches, it is certainly not true that those who have experienced the new birth and have become new creatures have habits that are no different from those of the world about them. I think we would do well to heed the words of a well-known Calvinistic theologian of a few years back, James Oliver Buswell, Jr., when he said:

I have heard several pseudo-Calvinistic speakers in Christian college chapel exercises say, "Dear young people, there are two ways to go to heaven: the spiritual way and the carnal way. It is so much better to take the spiritual way!" I knew a certain young person who believed this false doctrine and said to the Dean, "I am a Christian, but I do not mind sitting in the bleachers. I choose to go to heaven the carnal way!" No! the carnal way is the way to eternal punishment. "Those who practice things of this kind are not going to inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21).

Buswell went on to say:

I am not denying that a regenerate child of God may fall into carnality. . . . But my point is that so long as a professing Christian is in the state of carnality, no pastor, no Christian friend, has the slightest ground for holding that this carnal person has ever been regenerated. . . . It is a pastor's duty to counsel such a person. "You do not give any evidence of being in a regenerate state."<sup>16</sup>

16. James Oliver Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1962), 2:146-47.

He further stated: "We cannot make it too emphatic that a profession of faith, even what one may consider a "conversion experience," is no guarantee of eternal life for one who persistently lives in sin.<sup>17</sup>

These are strange times we are living in. There was a time when we would have been sure that, if anyone had talked about such loose living as is described in the Barna report above, they surely were not attending a church that professed to be Bible-believing. We can no longer draw such a conclusion. I might also say that such behavior as this report addresses would not have found acceptance even in theologically liberal churches during the days of the Fundamentalist-Liberal Controversy. Such talk as that which I have just cited should stir both holy indignation and compassion in us. We should have holy indignation toward such nonsense. We should have compassion on people who have been deceived by such thinking.

When I gave the quotation from John R. Rice above, I observed that in those days there were those who considered that people could be saved and never manifest any alteration in their lifestyle. However, I want to point out an important fact about the church world in those days. Though Rice and others who followed his line of thinking contended that a person could be saved and manifest no difference in lifestyle from sinners around them, they preached hard against sin and tried to make a difference. They held up a high standard concerning what Christian conduct should be. Nobody was saying that such obvious violations of morality were acceptable. In the light of the Barna Report given above, we would have to conclude that such is not the case today. An alarming number of people who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Savior are lending their endorsement to obviously sinful acts and lifestyles. *What makes this even more disturbing is that there is no obvious indication that there is any great stirring in American pulpits to confront the problem.*

It is not that our pulpits are sanctioning the kind of behavior to which Barna calls our attention. No pastor in a Bible-believing church would stand in the pulpit and stamp his approval to such conduct. I am afraid that our approach is too much like that of Eli in the days of Samuel. In 1 Samuel 3:13, God announced that he would bring judgment on the house of Eli "because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them." It is a mistake to conclude that Eli did not remind his sons that what they were doing was wrong. A reading of 1 Samuel 2:22-25 will show that he did talk to his sons about their behavior. *Eli's problem was that he did not take the kind of measures that would get results.* I am afraid that we have not made an adequate assessment of the problem that Barna's

17. Ibid.

report is pointing out to us. For that reason, we do not have an adequate commitment or adequate plans for dealing with the problem (Luke 14:28-33).

I feel that in some way I owe an apology to the young people of this generation for not having done a better job in my contribution to preparing the way. We cannot lay all the blame on this generation. Those of us who went before have failed them. But there is no generation that is excused from accountability before a holy God. Those of us whose roots go back for a while should not just criticize. We need to ask ourselves, "Where did we fail?" We need to make a noble effort to rectify our failure.

### *The Loss That Comes from Caving In to the Influence of Barbarism*

Probably the most difficult area for churches to deal with these days is the area of ideals. Ideals have to do with areas such as beauty, excellence, civility, refinement, manners, politeness, and propriety. As a result of the influence of Postmodernism, all of these are in shambles in our culture. Many in the church world view this as a neutral area, a matter of private taste. It is felt that the best thing that we can do is to go with the flow of the culture. In fact, you are considered a hindrance to the growth of the church if you feel disposed to have any concern for beauty, excellence, and propriety.

I appreciate every sincere effort that anyone has put forth in trying to reach the people whose lives have been influenced by Postmodernism. However, I think that when we take a serious look at what we are up against, we will see that some of the methods that have been used will either need to be set aside or seriously modified.

Solomon's temple was probably one of the most beautiful buildings that has ever been built. You could probably say that it was extravagant in its beauty. It represented in a symbolic way the presence of God. It was a demonstration of beauty and excellence because it was designed to convey the concept of the beauty, the royal majesty, the glory, and the infinite excellence of God. If we can get some glimpse of the purpose that the temple served in the Old Testament, it may be that we will be able to gain some appreciation of the fact that in the New Testament *we are seen to be the temple of God*. In Ephesians 2:21 we see that the universal church is viewed as the temple of God. In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 2 Corinthians 6:16 we see that a local church is considered to be the temple of God. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul tells us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. What a privilege! What an honor! We are created in God's image. We are the temple of God. Though our best effort to reflect the likeness of



God will be feeble and flawed, when we see the beauty, the excellence, and the majesty of God and remember that we are to be in the likeness of God, how can we do less than make an attempt to demonstrate a concern for beauty, excellence, and ideals?

The challenge that is before us is how can we uphold high ideals without driving away those who do not measure up? This kind of challenge has always been before the church and forever will be. How do we stand for righteousness without driving sinners away? How can we be against alcohol and influence those who have problems with alcohol to come to us for help? How can we talk about the tragedy of divorce without driving away those who are already divorced? We need to raise the same questions about ideals. How can we uphold ideals without driving away those who do not demonstrate them?

It is a truncated view of Christianity when there is loss of concern for propriety. The loss of a sense of propriety is traceable to the influence of Postmodernism, first in the culture and then in the churches. Postmodernism has no concern for propriety. When Postmodernism's lack of concern for propriety finds its way into the churches, things that do not belong together take place in the same service. In one part of the service it may look and sound like you are attending a classical concert. In another part of the same service, it may look and sound like you are at the Grand Ole Opry, or you may be reminded of a rock concert.

Can we live up to Paul's admonition in Philippians 4:8 and show little or no regard for propriety? Is propriety to be so privatized and personalized that we are to abolish all concern and hope for a working consensus on propriety? Are we to accept the viewpoint that if a particular thing is acceptable under one circumstance then it is acceptable under any circumstance? Are we to buy into Postmodernism's insistence that we must erase all distinctions between higher and lower and good and bad when it comes to the arts?<sup>18</sup>

18. Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon comment on Postmodernism's breakdown of the divide between "high" and "popular" art. They explain:

Andreas Huyssen argues at length, in his *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986), that the breakdown of the divide between "high" and "popular" art is one of the most characteristic and contested things about the postmodern—something Leslie Fielder had noted as early as 1965 in his essay "The New Mutants." The resulting heterogeneity of discourse has always upset those operating within a purist, modern paradigm—be it in architecture or music. Of course, other things upset them too—and perhaps one way of trying to represent the postmodern would be to look at precisely those traits.

See Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, eds., *A Postmodern Reader* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 196.

What I think is not important simply because I think it. It is important only if it is true. What impact does the Bible have on the question of the abridgment of Christianity?

#### THE CHALLENGE OF SCRIPTURE

In Hebrews 5:12-14, the writer chides his readers by pointing out that though they have been Christians long enough that they should be teachers, they still need to be taught the elementary truths of Christianity. He is having to feed them with milk, not solid food. He reminds them, "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (verse 14).

The recipients of this epistle are reminded that those who are mature are "those who by reason of use [practice, or working at it] have their senses exercised [trained] to discern both good and evil." With regard to the interpretation of "good" and "evil" as it is used in this context, I find myself in agreement with Philip Hughes when he says:

*Good and evil* should not be understood merely in an ethical sense here as signifying good conduct and evil conduct, but more particularly, as the context requires, in a comprehensive theological sense, namely, of good and evil, or true and false, doctrine, which would include moral teaching.<sup>19</sup>

Even though the author of Hebrews had rebuked these people for their immaturity and dullness of hearing, he refused to let that deter him from moving on into deeper matters and taking them with him. He said to them in 6:1: "Let us go on to perfection [Greek *teleiotes*, maturity]." This was not simply an admonition for the future. He was letting them know that it was his plan to move them along in that direction as he continued in the epistle.

He was reminding them that they needed to press on beyond the elementary teachings of Christianity. The foundation had already been laid with these people. They already knew the basic truths of Christianity. They were to build a structure of Christian thought on that foundation which consisted of a knowledge of "repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" (Hebrews 6:1-2). I

19. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 193.

think we would consider a person to be rather mature if he had a basic grasp of these subjects. It would be an improvement for most people in the churches today if they did have a grasp of these truths.

This passage deserves a lot of attention. However, it will not be necessary for our purpose in this presentation to become involved in a detailed study. For those who would like to delve more deeply into this passage, I would recommend the commentaries by John Brown,<sup>20</sup> F. F. Bruce,<sup>21</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes,<sup>22</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker,<sup>23</sup> and R. C. H. Lenski.<sup>24</sup>

After reading the challenge that was given to these people and the courageous example of the writer of Hebrews, we dare not allow the immaturity of people, their dullness of hearing, and their desire for thrills and immediate gratification to keep us from going on and taking all that we can with us in the direction of unabridged Christianity. Let us be admonished by the words of Paul and the words of Jesus. Paul told the Ephesian elders "I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you," and "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:20 and 27). In answering Satan, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4, italics mine).

We would do well to take heed to the words of Marva Dawn in her book, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*:

We miss the "whole counsel of God" if we neglect various forms of biblical literature, the multiple portraits of God. Worship requires a blend of the infinite attributes of God—focusing appropriately on God's majesty, humility, wrath, grace, hiddenness, ambiguity, love, hate, mercy, creativity, holiness, power, suffering, immanence, beauty, glory, and mystery.<sup>25</sup>

20. John Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: n.p., 1862; reprint ed., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964).

21. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews in The International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964).

22. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977).

23. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews in New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984).

24. R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of Hebrews, and James* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, n. d.).

25. Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn of the Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 90.

## CONCLUDING CHALLENGE

I think it is important for us to have peace and unity in our churches. But I think resorting to an abridged Christianity is the wrong way to achieve this unity. It is incumbent upon us to develop a complete and comprehensive Christian worldview. All truth is important. Human beings are *designed* with a need for a comprehensive worldview.

Our challenge is great. We must take our responsibility seriously. Every human being is made in the image of God. He or she is made for a positive relationship with God. For that one who is away from God, there is an emptiness that only God can fill. Even in the most hardened person and in the one in the greatest darkness there is a longing for something that they may not be able to identify. But we know what it is. There is something within that longs for a right relationship with God. It is our responsibility under God to learn how, with the help of God, to reach these people and when we do reach them to give them the whole counsel of God.

Christianity is comprehensive. It touches all the bases. It speaks to the whole of life and thought. *We must not settle for an abridged or truncated view of Christianity.*

I have touched on a few ways that Christianity has been abridged. I encourage you to review what I have said and make your own observations about how Christianity has been truncated. Make your commitment to help us move toward unabridged Christianity.

I believe that to reclaim our goal, if we ever had it, of moving toward unabridged Christianity is of utmost importance. I see very little hope for the tragic situation that we see ourselves in today if we do not make a move in this direction. I have great hope for the future if we will repent and move in the direction of unabridged Christianity. Yes, I said, "Repent." We need to make a deliberate and conscious choice to commit ourselves to cultivate a new mindset.

When a person calls for forthright preaching on sin, guilt, judgment, hell, the need of atonement, and the need for repentance, we become afraid that extremism is headed our way. There is very little danger of extremism or a bull-in-the-China-shop approach among those who are committed to declaring the whole counsel of God and working toward unabridged Christianity. The person who appreciates and makes use of the whole keyboard on the piano will not be given to a monotonous repetition of a few notes.

Stephen M. Ashby

# Prolegomena to Christian Apologetics: Being, Knowing, and Doing

Apologetics is a conflict discipline. It brings out visceral responses from those who acknowledge its importance and also from those who wish to avoid it at all costs. Even among those who are drawn toward apologetic pursuits there are long-standing debates over the propriety of apologetic posture.<sup>1</sup> Neither can the given approach be easily categorized by whether one is a Calvinist or an Arminian in his theological commitments. Certainly, the issues raised by considering apologetics in whole or in part are numerous and oftentimes deep. Nonetheless, neither the depth nor the breadth of the issue should dictate whether the subject should be engaged . . . but rather, its importance. For that reason, I wish to broach some preliminary thoughts concerning the admittedly thorny area called apologetics.

In opening up the question of Christian apologetics, one quickly finds that the field itself is a cross section, or hybrid, of philosophy and theology. Many long-standing philosophical questions are brought to bear on the presentation of the Christian message. Hence, the Christian worldview at large and the particulars that comprise that worldview receive a challenge from without. A truth claim has been made, and a counterclaim has been offered. Who is right? What is the truth? Apologetics has an interest in truth. When competing truth claims come into conflict, epistemological issues come to the fore.<sup>2</sup> This crossroads of conflicting truth claims is the arena in which apologetic encounter takes place. It occurs when a conflict arises between belief and unbelief. And while the specific idea of apologetics need not be limited to areas of Christian thought, one does not need to think too long or hard to see the immediate applicability to Christian proclamation.

Beyond the logical correlation that one might find between Christian witness and apologetics, there is biblical example and injunction for doing the work of the apologist. The classical passage which speaks to this issue is found in 1 Peter 3:15-16.

1. Evidentialists insist upon an *a posteriori* approach whereas presuppositionalists argue for *a priori* methodology.

2. One seems compelled to question whether it is possible *to know* in an intellectually credible sense that the one claim is correct while its counterclaim is in error.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense [Greek, *apologia*] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.<sup>3</sup>

In this passage Peter makes clear that the individual who is giving the Christian *apologia* is doing so in the face of those who are reviling him (1) for his truth claim, i.e., “the reason for his hope” and (2) for his righteous life, literally “his good in Christ conduct.” Christian *apologia*, when seen in its biblical usage, is never meant to be an excuse for error. Neither does it have reference to apologizing in the modern sense of that term. A third thing that should not be read into this endeavor is an attempt to discover the truth. The term *apologia* has a very specific and intentional meaning when viewed inductively according to its biblical usage. A brief survey of how the biblical writers use the noun *apologia* and the verb *apologeomai* will be instructive.

Luke 12:11-12 – “Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what *you should answer*, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”<sup>4</sup>

Certain things are clear from this passage. The *apologia* spoken of here is made in the face of attack. The defense, or answer, given has its source in the Holy Spirit. And this directive is given specifically to the apostles who are functioning as inspired representatives of God. This is not to be used by us as an excuse for not thinking or doing our homework.

Acts 22:1 – “Brethren and fathers, hear my *defense* before you now.”

Paul is not asking for their indulgence. Instead, he is defending or vindicating his actions against the accusation that he has been teaching against the law and polluting the temple (21:28). Again, in each of the passages that follow, the word *apologia* or its cognate is used in the sense of vindication or defense.

3. Quotations from Scripture are taken from the New King James Version (1988).

4. The italics in this quotation, as in those below, are added to indicate the use in the original of a form of *apologia* or a cognate of it.

Acts 24:10 – “Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: ‘Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, *I do* the more cheerfully *answer* for myself.’”

Acts 25:8 – “while *he* [Paul] *answered for himself*, ‘Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.’”

Acts 25:16 – “It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity *to answer* for himself concerning the charge against him.”

Acts 26:1-2 – “Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You are permitted to speak for yourself.’ So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: ‘I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today *I shall answer for myself* before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews.’”

The Greek term *apologia*, along with its various forms, is an important New Testament term. Whereas the King James Version and the New King James Version regularly set forth the notion of “giving an answer,” other translations usually render it “to give a defense,” “to vindicate the truth which is under attack,” or “to vindicate one’s innocence as in a trial.”<sup>5</sup> The Greek usage is that of a legal defense. It is as though one were giving a lawyer’s brief, vindicating the stance that is being set forth in an adjudicatory process. Paul gives instruction to Timothy, his son in the ministry, concerning the apologetic enterprise. It comes in the overall context of his directive toward faithful service in preaching the word of God consistently, which will involve: reproof, rebuke, exhortation, and setting forth doctrine. The context is one of evangelism and edification. However, within this context Paul emphasizes that all will not be smooth sailing. Some will not accept sound teaching. Some will follow their lustful desires. They will find teachers who tell them what they want to hear. They will turn away from the truth and toward fables. It is in the context of doing the regular work of the ministry, i.e., evangelism and edification, that the need for apologetic defense of the truth arises. When people reject the truth and oppose sound teaching, Timothy is instructed to be sober-minded and endure the hardships, so that he may fulfill the evangelistic charge that he has been given in the ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

5. See W. E. Vine’s *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1966), 61. Cf. Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 1:51.

A little later in this chapter Paul uses himself as an example of what it means to be "sober-minded" and to "endure hardship" in the face of opposition. In vv. 14-17 Paul says that Alexander the coppersmith did him great harm as he opposed the gospel message. In the face of this opposition, Paul gave his defense:

At my first defense [*apologia*] no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion (2 Timothy 4:16-17).

It seems clear from all this that apologetic defense of the gospel may have to be done repeatedly. When it is done, the opposition may be stiff, and the confrontation may be strident. The person who is engaged in apologetics may have to go it alone at times. But the goal is that the preaching (v. 17) might be fully proclaimed. That was the goal for Paul, and he was transferring that charge to Timothy (vv. 1-5). One thing is certain. The term *apologia* used in its New Testament sense means a defense of the truth, already possessed, against false accusations and opposition. The activity of apologetics must not be viewed as a neutral enterprise where in open-minded individuals are simply searching for the truth.

If, indeed, the goal of apologetics is that the message might be fully proclaimed as Paul asserted in 2 Timothy 4, then what issues serve as precursors to an effective presentation in apologetic encounter? While many subjects could be broached, I wish to suggest three which I feel are essential in establishing prolegomena for Christian apologetics.<sup>6</sup> These three subjects are treated below, and the issues raised are addressed under the rubric of "Being," "Knowing," and "Doing."

#### THE BAROMETER OF BEING

Cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker wrote a Pulitzer Prize winning book entitled *The Denial of Death*. Throughout this book, which synthesizes a wide array of scholarship, Becker consistently intimates that human beings are the only beings for whom being is an issue. This seems to me to be a very profound declaration. When I read the book, it caused

6. Prolegomenon, a compound from two Greek words, means "what is said before." Hence, a prolegomenon to Christian apologetics is an attempt at providing a critical introduction which will precede the apologetic enterprise.



me to think back with fondness to the time when I was a twelve-year-old boy growing up in Ohio. Free Will Baptist representatives from Nashville used to stay in our home quite often. I remember Paul Kettelman staying with us and my being given the assignment of riding with him, to show him around wherever he needed to go in Dayton. When his stay with us was finished, he called me over to his car and put his hands on my shoulders. In a very serious moment Mr. Kettelman said: "There's one thing I always want you to remember." I said, "What?" He said, "Remember, you'll be a man before your mother will." This man was a prophet! He told me to remember it, and I still do. Nonetheless, whether being silly and teasing with a youngster about what you're going to be when you grow up, like my good friend Paul Kettelman did, or whether seeking to be profound, and thus creating an anthropomorphic philosophical system which sets out to define what it means to *be-in-the-world* as Martin Heidegger has done, one thing is certain: we as human beings cannot get away from the issue of what it means for us to be. Becker was on to something: human beings are certainly the only created beings for whom being is an issue.

With that said, I would assert that being is an issue for Christians pre-eminently. However, at the same time I would quickly add that being is also an issue for unbelievers. Herein lies some apologetic common ground. F. Leroy Forlines directs our attention to what he calls "the inescapable questions of life."<sup>7</sup> I believe that one of those inescapable questions which keeps resurfacing for both believers and unbelievers is the question: "What does it mean for me to be?"

Jesus said:

Matthew 6:25 – "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

Luke 12:15 – "One's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Paul added:

Galatians 2:20 – "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

7. F. Leroy Forlines, *The Quest for Truth: Answering Life's Inescapable Questions* (Nashville: Randall House Publications, 2001).

Colossians 3:3-4 – “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

These passages and many others address the question of what it means for a Christian to be. One particularly important passage in this regard may be found in 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6. Paul there makes three points concerning Christian being:

- I. Believers are Christ’s manifestation (2:14-16).
- II. Believers are Christ’s manuscript (3:2-3).
- III. Believers are Christ’s ministers (3:4-6).

In 1986-87 I was working at Liberty University when the story was breaking about Jim Bakker and the PTL scandal. I remember one particular Sunday evening when Jerry Falwell got up and said, “We as a Christian community have a huge image problem.” As I sat there I thought, “What we’ve got is not an image problem; it’s an integrity problem.” *Image* is how people perceive you from without. *Integrity* has to do with what you are within. The real issue is the issue of being. It is an issue with God, but it is also an issue with the world. Scandals have done damage to Christians’ credibility, but not primarily because of a tarnished image. Rather, credibility has suffered because people have rightly recognized that we are not what we have professed to be in far too many instances. Further, those of us who are laboring in relative obscurity must not take repose with the thought that, “I function on a local level in a small denomination, having never experienced even the fifteen minutes of fame we hear about so often.” In fact, each of us knows that the horrific tales of scandal are not limited to TV Evangelists and others whose names cross the Associated Press wire. They happen at the local level and in Free Will Baptist circles, just as they do with other groups. The truth is that Christians’ credibility has suffered. Why? Because human beings are the only beings for whom being is an issue. It does not matter to the cows in the field or the dogs in the street or the cats in the alley if they have a different partner every single night. But it matters to the world whether Christians are *who they say they are*. And it matters to God that we be who we say we are.

In 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6 Paul indicates that others ought to be able to sense Christ in the believers with whom they come into contact. This is true for both the unregenerate and the regenerate. Christ manifests himself through the scent that Christians emit. To believers it is the sweet

scent of life, while for unbelievers they sense the contrast and thus realize the stench of their own death (2:14-16). In both instances believers are Christ's manifestation. Paul goes on in the next chapter to declare that believers are Christ's manuscript (epistles), written not with ink on tablets of stone but by the Spirit of the living God on the tables of the heart (3:2-3). With this metaphor Paul is declaring that others ought to be able to see Christ in the lives of believers—for their lives are to be an open book "known and read by all men." There should be no nooks or crannies hidden from view. Believers are to be read by others, because they are Christ's manuscript. Thirdly, Paul indicates that believers are Christ's ministers (3:4-6). Hence, they give out the service of Christ, because in Christ they have been made "ministers of the new covenant." According to Paul, the world should be able to smell Christ in us, to see Christ in us, and to receive the service of Christ from us. And all of this is because of who believers are declared to be in Christ Jesus. Being is the question, first and foremost, if we are to give to every man a credible defense of the hope that lies within us.

Having established that being is critical for believers, we must now go on to insist that one's being must be grounded in the reality of Christian truth. It is not good enough to have a self-styled sort of Christianity. Just because someone feels that something provides a good subjective fit for him does not automatically make that thing a proper reflection of Christian truth or practice. Our belief and practice must be grounded in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42), i.e., one's being must be brought into conformity with the reality of Christian truth. I might illustrate this point by revealing a little bit about myself. I fashion myself as something of a collector. Eight years ago I started saving all of my banana peelings. I keep them in my garage. The reason I do this is because I know what most others don't know. The time is coming soon when the United States is going to do away with its dollar-based currency. They intend to replace it with a banana-peel currency. Now, while some may laugh at that, I would expect that they will be the very ones hitting me up for a loan when the conversion takes place.

One of my all time favorite musicals came out in the mid-1960s. It was called *Man of La Mancha*. On one level it is just a fun-loving little story. But, when someone is familiar with existentialist philosophy, he can see woven into this play a riveting story of existential angst.<sup>8</sup> The protagonist is asserting a meaning in a world where there is no meaning,

8. See C. Stephen Evans's fine analysis of this play in his *Existentialism: The Philosophy of Despair and the Quest for Hope* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 77-80.

under the umbrella of a certain and imminent death. Don Quixote, with his trusted sidekick Sancho Panza, is going into battle to fight with a windmill (which he thinks is a giant). He is going to battle on behalf of his beloved, pure virgin, Dulcinea (who is in reality the town prostitute). Before he leaves, he takes the barber's shaving basin, turns it upside down, and places it upon his head, dubbing it "the Helmet of Mambrino." Now he is ready to do battle! All too often, Christians go out to do battle for the Lord in this self-same way, self-styled, making up answers as they go. If that is the case, as apologist Dave Dewitt says, then when it comes to answering the tough ones, their being will be found out in short order.<sup>9</sup> The Christian's being must be grounded in the reality of Christian truth.

Six years ago I had a very bright young student who was very diligent about her studies. This was her second class with me. She had taken *Introduction to Philosophy* and now was in my *Religion and Literature* course. In this class we had read Voltaire, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Jean Paul Sartre, Camus, Hawthorne, Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor. It was a fairly rigorous course, and I had chosen the reading list carefully. About two-thirds of the way through the semester—I think we were just finishing William Faulkner's *Light in August*—she raised her hand just five minutes into class and said:

Dr. Ashby, it's obvious that you have read and thought carefully about this literature and a lot more. I have to ask you this question. *How is it that you can maintain your faith?*

Well, now I was on! Was I going to be ready? I hadn't anticipated getting this question on this day. And what was the import of her question, *How is it that you can maintain your faith?* During the semester I had had them reading godless literature—things that attack the Christian faith head on. But there was a balance there: some of it attacked; some of it defended. What was she really asking?

It seemed to me that there was a presupposition behind that question. It was one that I had encountered many times in university life. Simply stated, it says "people of faith are mindless." The assumption is clear, "Christians don't think carefully or critically or deeply about the issues. They just simply accept as six-year-olds what they are taught in Sunday school and never seriously question anything—even in the face of a mountain of evidence and scholarship and great thinkers." The problem that my student now faced was this. Her philosophy professor, who

9. David A. Dewitt, *Answering the Tough Ones* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

was introducing her to many of these great thinkers, had thought carefully through what they say. At this point, she did not have a box to put me in. We must not kid ourselves. Being matters in apologetics today.

Christians have to earn the right to be heard in today's world. In this postmodern age of pluralistic thought, Christians are not simply granted a hearing along with everybody else. There is pluralism for everybody except for evangelical Christians who are serious about their faith. Christians must win the right to get into the conversation. *How is it that you maintain your faith?* She was asking that question during class time. Would I be ready to give a credible defense of the hope that lies within me? For the next hour and ten minutes the state of Indiana paid me to do Christian apologetics with this young agnostic woman along with assorted other variations of unbelievers. The initial barometer that people are reading to see if they should allow you into the conversation is the barometer of being.

#### THE NECESSITY OF KNOWING

A second key area that serves as a precursor to doing effective apologetics is the area of knowing. In 1953 a book was published posthumously with the thoughts and dictated notes of a man who was perhaps the most influential philosopher of the twentieth century, Ludwig Wittgenstein. The book was entitled *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>10</sup> A very interesting point to know about this book is that it was an outright attack upon his own earlier ground breaking work called *The Tractatus*.<sup>11</sup> I think this stands as unique in the entire history of philosophy: that is, a thinker producing at different periods two very original systems of thought, each elegant and powerful, each greatly influencing the whole philosophical community of its day, yet the second being a criticism and rejection of the first. There was, however, a common factor between the two works. This was Wittgenstein's primary contribution to contemporary philosophy. He demonstrated, very clearly, the importance of the study of language.

In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein developed a notion called "language games" that has made its way into popular parlance. Every game has its own set of rules used to govern and to set the boundaries of acceptable behavior within the context of that particular game. This is true of the games we play. No one would be likely to confuse the Major League Baseball Rule Book with the sixth game of the 1975 World Series.

10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

11. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922).

However, Wittgenstein's point is that there are "language games" going on, not only in the games we play but also in the culture of which we are a part. These exist even in every subculture within which we participate. A part of the "rules of the game" in the subculture known as IBM has been :

a three-piece suit  
a two-drink lunch  
and closing the deal.

Bill Gates has introduced us to the world of mainframes, gigabytes, CPUs, and viruses that people are more afraid of than they are of typhoid fever or tuberculosis. Every culture and every subculture has its own "language game." Philosophy has its own. The medical community has its own. The church has its own—and woe be unto us if we do not recognize the intricacy of our own "language game." Christians must seek to bridge the gap with those who are outside by finding common themes and by learning to communicate cross-culturally.

I really enjoy "language play." In American culture "language play" is something that tends to grow and diminish at various times. In the last several years we have been made aware of those among us known as YUPPIES (Young Urban Professionals). We also know of BUPPIES (Black Urban Professionals). Now we have DINKS (Double Income-No Kids), and even SIT-KOMS (Single Income-Two Kids-Outrageous Mortgages). "Language play" can be a great deal of fun. In the New Testament passage mentioned in the previous section (2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6), Paul uses two different kinds of word play. First, he contrasts his ministry with that of those he referred to at the end of chapter 2, who he says are peddling the Word of God for profit. These "gospel-hawkers" have trumped-up *letters* of commendation with which they are gaining entrance into Christian communities. Paul says that he does not need such letters, for the Corinthian Christians are themselves the *letters* of Christ which have been produced through his ministry. Next, he uses a second type of word play. With the contrast having been set forth by his two distinct uses of the word "letter," he then drives home his point. He says, "[you are] known and read by all men." The Greek words for "known" and "read" are *ginosko* and *anaginosko*. Paul got his readers' attention with word play, then he made his point. "Do I need a letter? How ludicrous! You are my letter! You are *ginosko*'ed (known) and *anaginosko*'ed (read) by all men. You are not some trumped-up letter. You are the Real McCoy.

Paul has said that they are Christ's letter, written upon by the Spirit of the living God (3:3). Hence, the long-standing question seems appropriate: "Who has a right to say what a poem means?" The answer should be obvious: only the author, for he has created it. While there may be differing interpretations, differing readings, differing levels of significance, meaning is the province of the author. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., is correct when he says that *meaning must be attached to the author's intent*.<sup>12</sup> If Christians are Christ's letter, if Christ himself is the author, then the meaning of what Christ is writing is not merely up for grabs. Christians may not simply attach any meaning to their lives that they may so choose. Paul is playing with language here, but his purpose is very serious. My point is that "language games" are fine and "language play" is fun, that is, as long as one understands where the boundaries are and as long as the purpose and the meaning are not lost.

However, I would hasten to say that there are "language games" that are being played today that are not healthy. Certain movements are playing some very dangerous games with language. In the current context of language theory we see several prevailing hegemonies at work:

- I. The devaluation of the word
- II. The diminution of the author
- III. The deconstruction of the text

Each of these has been spawned in the womb of relativistic presuppositions. As such, when we read their words or think about their assertions (which we should do), we must keep in mind that we are making our way through what is primarily enemy territory.

There was a time when everyone who read George Orwell's *1984* made fun of the notion of "DOUBLESPEAK" or "NEWSPEAK."<sup>13</sup> But far short of making fun of it today, it is practiced by much of the general population and by nearly all politicians. Need we remind ourselves that President Clinton defended his misstatements to the grand jury in the Paula Jones case by saying, "Well, that all depends on what was meant by the word *is*." And far from holding his feet to the fire for such deceptive use of language, average people from the general populace defended him. My barber, my physical therapist, and even some within my own family defended him because of the "mean spirit of those who opposed

12. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 8.

13. George Orwell, *1984* (New York: New American Library, 1949).

him." When we engage in apologetic encounter today, we need to be very aware of our culture's relativistic inclination to devalue the word.

When I speak of devaluing the word, I am not merely talking about the Word of God. I am referring to language itself. Few people are aware that in the first one hundred fifty years of the America's existence as a country, the United States Supreme Court only dealt with five cases related to religious freedom, that is, cases involving federal law. But, in the last fifty years we have had hundreds of such cases. Why is that? The reason is that our modern-day Supreme Court has devalued the words of the First Amendment. The First Amendment states:

*Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.*

I wonder when was the last time any of us heard one of our congressmen proposing a bill that said every American must be a Free Will Baptist or that they could not be Roman Catholic. That is the establishment of religion and prohibiting the free exercise thereof in strict recognition of what the framers of the Constitution have said. But the Supreme Court has devalued the words of the First Amendment. They pay no attention to the fact that it is dealing with Congress passing laws. They have been far more interested in pushing an agenda.

Relativism is rampant in our culture today. In other words, people assert that mutually exclusive beliefs can both be true at the same time and in the same sense. I am not decrying differences of perception or personal preference, such as how warm one person feels as opposed to another or preferring blondes over brunettes. But it is a completely different condition when one takes the statements: *God exists, God does not exist*. These are mutually exclusive statements. The law of noncontradiction demands that these statements cannot both be talking about the same God and both be true, one's personal beliefs notwithstanding. The epistemological relativist wants to deny Christians the opportunity to speak about biblical Christianity. This is done through the devaluation of words, that is, simply making them fit one's agenda. It is also done with relativistic presuppositions. You cannot start with relativistic presuppositions and arrive at Christian conclusions. It will be impossible to do effective Christian apologetics if home court advantage is given to one's opponent in these areas.

Another area of grave concern in this regard is the diminution of the author. In the broad-ranging field of language theory today, any appeal



to "authorial intent" is likely to be ridiculed as anachronistic.<sup>14</sup> Getting back to the illustration about the First Amendment, people will often speak glowingly about the framers of the Constitution. Yet, with their next statement, they will immediately proceed to ignore the obvious intent of the framers in the name of cultural elasticity. Roland Barthes wrote a now famous essay entitled "The Death of the Author." In it he claims that his work is "an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law."<sup>15</sup> We must be on guard concerning the tendency to decouple meaning from authorial intent. Carl F. H. Henry, in his massive six-volume set, directs us to pay attention to *God, Revelation, and Authority*.<sup>16</sup> Francis Schaeffer speaks convincingly of the God who is there and is not silent.<sup>17</sup> God is the ultimate author and his authorship matters. I believe that one undermines the possibility of objective meaning when he leaves behind the notion of "authorial intent." All that is left is relativism and skepticism.

This brings us to the deconstruction of the text. Such individuals as Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Paul deMan, and Geoffrey Hartmann have collectively done the theoretical work necessary to undermine both the author and the text. Each has located meaning within the reader, or within the community to which one belongs. Former Duke professor Stanley Fish has written a book entitled *Is There a Text in This Class?*<sup>18</sup> He took his title from a question that he posed to one of his undergraduate seminars. Of course, everyone thought he was asking if everyone had his textbook with him that day. That was not what he was asking. He was asking whether the class (the group of students) could function as the text—thus locating meaning within the group. Or could the individual serve as the text—locating meaning in the individual. Such deconstructionist approaches have served as the primary tools for doing Reader-Response Criticism, Gender-Based Criticism, Ethnic-Based Criticism, and Gay-Lesbian Criticism.

14. As mentioned in the discussion of Hirsch above, the meaning of a text is delimited by what the author intended through his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent.

15. Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S. Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 147.

16. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1979). Henry, in vol. 4, ch. 1, "The Modern Revolt against Authority," seems to address the exact issue raised by Roland Barthes.

17. Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972).

18. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

If interpretation does not grant integrity to the word, if interpretation does not grant intention to the author, if interpretation does not grant meaning to the text, then all that is left is the reader. Hence, the *reader* becomes the *creator*. The reader simply takes the marks on the page and imbues them with whatever meaning that he or she sees fit to give them. Language play is fun, and language games are good—as long as we understand the boundaries and do not get lost regarding the purpose and the meaning. Otherwise, we have no common basis of knowledge in defending the faith.

#### DETERMINATION IN DOING

The final area I wish to deal with is the area of doing. Each of the categories I have addressed under the rubrics of Being, Knowing, and Doing has an understanding attached to it that is clearly Christian, over against an alternative approach that is not Christian. But my contention is that both believers and unbelievers are concerned with matters that proceed from these areas of Being, Knowing, and Doing. It cannot be otherwise. As Forlines has rightly asserted, the issues that come out of these categories present people with questions they cannot escape. They cannot help but ask questions such as:

- I. What does it mean for me to be?
- II. How can I know?
- III. What should I do?

Of course, they may answer the questions wrongly, but they *cannot* avoid asking the questions.

Since this is the case, Christian apologists ought to be able to find in these areas what is sometimes called “common ground.” That does not mean that we as believers are working from the same presuppositions as unbelievers. It does not mean that we are arriving at the same conclusions they are. Nor does it mean that our process is the same as we work through the issues. What it does mean is that both believers and unbelievers have an interest in some of the same things, and this is good news for apologetics. We have both a starting point and that which can be talked about between us.

Several years ago I taught a class in Continental Philosophy. I had my students read *The Myth of Sisyphus*, by Albert Camus.<sup>19</sup> In this work

19. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Random House, 1955).

Camus used the ancient legend, wherein the gods condemned Sisyphus to an eternity of pushing a huge rock up a hill. As soon as he would reach the top and a sense of satisfaction was about to set in for having completed the task, the boulder would roll down the other side—bringing frustration, disillusionment, despair, for he must now go down and once again put his shoulder to the task. This process was repeated endlessly. Camus's assertion was that this myth stands as a metaphor for the absurdity of human life, for all of life is nothing other than meaningless endeavor.

In Psalm 90, the oldest of the Psalms, we find Moses praying for two things in v. 17: (1) that we might have the beauty of God in our lives and (2) that we might achieve works that will last (that is, are truly meaningful). How is it that these objectives might be achieved? It appears that in order to understand what Moses is suggesting, it is advantageous to view the Psalm backwards. Verse 12 seems to give a major clue. Moses prays:

"So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

The book of Proverbs speaks often about "a heart of wisdom." The literal meaning of this phrase has to do with "skill in living."<sup>20</sup> There is a way of living life which causes us to acquire this "skill," and Moses outlines what will lead toward developing it. First, there must be a recognition and acceptance of death (Psalm 90:3), our own death. I must not live as though death will not happen to me personally. Secondly, we must recognize the brevity of life (Psalm 90:4-6). Moses gives four pungent analogies to show how short life truly is upon the earth. Once the individual has acknowledged that death is sure and that life is short, he is then ready to take the crucial step in developing a "heart of wisdom": he must recognize where the meaning in life comes from. And so, we return, once again, to the question, "Who can say what a poem means?" Ultimately the author! Or who can say what a pen should be used for? Certainly, its owner! Now, Scripture clearly teaches that we have neither made ourselves, nor do we own ourselves. Hence, we do not have the right merely to give our lives whatever meaning may satisfy us. To this extent, then, Camus is correct—most people are spending their lives in meaningless endeavor.

Camus goes to great lengths to illustrate this point in another of his novels, *The Plague*.<sup>21</sup> In this novel, Camus describes an awful plague being

20. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), s.v. "lev chakam."

21. Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Random House, 1972).

carried by rats in the town of Oran. Death is hanging over the whole town. But right in the middle of this scene, immediately after lunch every day:

a dapper little old man stepped out on the balcony . . . his snow-white hair always brushed to perfect smoothness. Leaning over the balcony he would call: PUSSY! PUSSY! in a voice at once haughty and endearing.

And he would drop scraps of paper that would flutter down like white butterflies. The cats would jump and paw at the scraps of paper.

Then, taking careful aim, the old man would spit vigorously at the cats and, whenever a liquid missile hit the quarry, [he] would beam with delight.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, this sounds preposterous. But how many of us know people personally who are living such an absurd existence?

In this same book, Camus's hero is a man named Joseph Grand. Grand has an ambition to be a great writer. But all the way through the book, Grand can't seem to get things rolling. In fact, he can never get the first sentence written. The reason for this is that he is a perfectionist. He wants to be sure that as soon as people read the first sentence, they will be so awestruck by the book's brilliance that they will immediately say, "hats off!"<sup>23</sup> Now, Camus may set out the thesis that life is absurd, but he cannot keep from creating characters who are positing some sort of meaning for their lives. If, indeed, all is absurd, then why would someone wish to write a book? And this challenge applies as much to Camus as it does to Grand. In reality, people (both believers and unbelievers) long for: (1) purpose, order, and beauty in their lives and (2) works that will last. No matter how stridently they may argue that nothing really matters or that there is no objective meaning to be found in what we do, the truth is that on an existential level, down deep in their hearts, they cannot make themselves believe it. And they cannot find a way to live out this thesis in their lives. People long for purpose and beauty in their lives and works that will last. Moses knew what he was talking about.

Flannery O'Connor picks up this theme of whether there is any objective meaning to what we do in life. One of the best examples may be seen in her short story "Good Country People."<sup>24</sup> The main character of the

22. *Ibid.*, 24-25.

23. *Ibid.*, 99.

24. Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People," in *Three: Wise Blood, A Good Man Is Hard to Find, The Violent Bear It Away* (New York: Signet Books, 1964).

story is Joy Hopewell, a thirty-two-year-old blonde with a Ph.D. and a bad attitude. However, her most striking characteristic is her wooden leg. She is a self-professed atheist who seems to have a cynical sort of compulsion to seduce a young Bible salesman. Her intent is to initiate him into evil. So, she lures him to the barn loft and begins to kiss him repeatedly and passionately. After a few minutes he starts mumbling that he loves her, obviously wishing that she say the same to him. Her response is truly remarkable. She says:

[Love], it's not a word I use. I don't have illusions. I'm one of those people who see *through* to nothing. . . . We all are damned, but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation.<sup>25</sup>

A little later, when they had returned to their petting, the young man has convinced her of his naiveté and innocence. Yet, he keeps pressing her playfully with an unusual request. He wants her to take her leg off. For a long while she resists, but after much pleading she finally relents and removes the wooden leg; at which point, he turns out to be the master prankster. He takes her leg and refuses to give it back to her. After a few moments of consternation, she becomes hysterical and begins screaming, "Give me my leg! Give me my leg!" His response is quite amazing. He says:

"What's the matter with you all of a sudden? . . . You just a while ago said you didn't believe in nothing. I thought you was some girl!" Her face was almost purple. "You're a Christian!" she hissed. "You're a fine Christian! You're just like them all—say one thing and do another."<sup>26</sup>

Flannery O'Connor is brilliantly satirizing this young intellectual, who thinks she has drunk deeply from the well of *nothing*. But she finds that she is humiliated and appalled when she is brought experientially face to face with *nothingness*.

Existentially, down deep in their hearts, people are longing for purpose and beauty in their lives and for works that will last. Had Joy Hopewell truly believed in *nothing*, then she would not have been surprised and appalled—no matter what this young Bible salesman might do. But, down deep, she did not believe in *nothing*. She believed that *he ought to be decent*. And why did she believe that? Because he was a Christian! But wait a minute. She did not believe in Christianity. Indeed,

25. *Ibid.*, 258.

26. *Ibid.*, 260-61.

she did not believe in "nothing." Hence, for her, there's nothing to Christianity. So, why should she be surprised if he acts like this? The reason is that on a deeper level she does believe it. And she also believes that those who claim that they believe it ought to live in accord with what they say they believe.

There are questions that people cannot escape from, no matter how hard they may try:

- I. What does it mean for me to be?
- II. How can I know the truth?
- III. What should I do?

These are questions of anthropology, ontology, epistemology, and ethics. These areas would seem to me to serve as some of our most fertile ground as we seek to do Christian apologetics. Of course, the skeptic, the naturalist, and the relativist will do all they can to divert the discussion and cloud the issues. But that is what we should expect from those who walk "in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened" (Ephesians 4:17-18). It is up to us as Christians to bear witness to that "light that shines in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19).

# Will the Real Arminius Please Stand Up?

## A Study of the Theology of Jacobus Arminius in Light of His Interpreters

ARMINIUS AND HIS INTERPRETERS

Jacobus Arminius has been the object of much criticism and much praise during the past four centuries. "Arminians" have usually lauded him as the progenitor of their theological tradition. Non-Arminians, specifically those within the Reformed-Calvinistic tradition, have denounced him for departing from the Reformed faith. Both praise and criticism, however, have mostly proceeded from partisan biases and rested on misinterpretations of Arminius's theology. Most Reformed critics have portrayed Arminius as a semi-Pelagian and a defector from Reformed theology. Most Arminians, both Wesleyans and Remonstrants, have cast him in Wesleyan or Remonstrant terms, failing to take seriously his theology itself and the context in which it was spawned.<sup>1</sup> Both these perspectives have seriously misunderstood Arminius, using him for polemical purposes rather than simply trying to understand and benefit from his theology.

Arminius's theology has been interpreted in a number of ways. One perspective has held that he was a transitional thinker—that his theology was an incomplete move from Calvinism to Arminianism. An example of this viewpoint is Frederic Platt's article in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*: "Though it is probable that Arminius himself was less Arminian than his followers, yet the most distinguished of these, Episcopius (his successor at Leyden), Uytenbogaert (his close friend), Limborch and Grotius, who most ably elaborated his positions—all men of great talents—only carried his conclusions to issues which the early death of Arminius probably prevented him from reaching."<sup>2</sup> This perspective sees Arminius's theology as a departure from Reformed theology, though he

1. Arminius's followers, the Remonstrants, though at first theologically close to Arminius, moved progressively further from him after his death.

2. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, s.v. "Arminianism," by Frederic Platt.

did not make a complete and consistent departure because of his premature death. Many Reformed thinkers, also viewing Arminius as making a significant departure from Reformed doctrine, portray Arminius as "a clever dissembler who secretly taught doctrines different from his published writings."<sup>3</sup> An example of such an opinion is found in Ben A. Warburton's *Calvinism*:

Grave contentions arose which disclosed the fact that Arminius, despite his pledges [to teach nothing contrary to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession of Faith], had been infecting the minds of many of the citizens. . . . That much cunning had been practised by Arminius there is little room to doubt, and that he was equally dishonest is clear. "Posing as orthodox amongst the orthodox he surreptitiously promulgated opinions the inevitable tendency of which was to undermine and overthrow the doctrine professed and to stir up distrust and dissension." . . . Koornheert had been open in his opposition to the teachings of Calvinism, but Arminius acted with treachery.<sup>4</sup>

Most writers attribute to Arminius ideas that came after him. Many Calvinists do this by blaming him for everything from deism to universalism. In 1889 church historian J. H. Kurtz linked the theology of Arminius to latitudinarianism and deism.<sup>5</sup> Roger Nicole describes Arminius as the originator of a slippery slope that started with Episcopius and Limborch (who were "infiltrated by Socinianism") and ended with Unitarianism, universalism, and the personalist philosophy of E. S. Brightman.<sup>6</sup> Reformed writers also consistently describe Arminius as a semi-Pelagian. Henry Bettenson, in his highly acclaimed *Documents of the Christian Church*, introduces "The Five Articles of the Remonstrance" with a short sketch of Arminius. He then describes Arminius as a semi-Pelagian who viewed predestination as tied to "God's foreknowledge of human merit."<sup>7</sup> Even more extreme than this is Kurtz's assertion that Arminius "wandered into Pelagian paths."<sup>8</sup>

3. Carl Bangs, "Arminius and the Reformation," *Church History* 30 (1961):156.

4. Ben A. Warburton, *Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 51.

5. J. H. Kurtz, *Church History*, trans. John MacPherson, 3 vols. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889), 3:50.

6. Roger Nicole, "The Debate over Divine Election," *Christianity Today* (October 21, 1959), 6.

7. Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 376.

8. Kurtz, 3:50.



Most Arminians, while praising Arminius, have viewed him in the light of either later Remonstrant or Wesleyan theology, thus describing him in more semi-Pelagian and synergist terms.<sup>9</sup> The tendency of most Arminians is to give a brief biographical sketch of Arminius, with the customary discussion of "Arminius as the Father of Arminianism," and then to offer an exposition of the five points of the Remonstrance. Or, as Carl Bangs says, such biographical sketches are often followed by "copious references to Arminius's successor, Simon Episcopius, who, although in many ways a faithful disciple of Arminius, is not Arminius."<sup>10</sup>

However, none of the above portraits is accurate. Only when readers bring preconceived agendas to Arminius's writings will they interpret them in these ways. Bangs summarizes this problem well:

It is evident that such accounts of Arminius assume a definition of Arminianism which cannot be derived from Arminius himself. It means that the writers begin with a preconception of what Arminius should be expected to say, then look in his published works, and do not find exactly what they are looking for. They show impatience and disappointment with his Calvinism, and shift the inquiry into some later period when Arminianism turns out to be what they are looking for—a non-Calvinistic, synergistic, and perhaps semi-Pelagian system. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Those who bring their own presuppositions into the study of Arminius and read later Arminian themes into his thought fail to realize perhaps the most important thing about his theology: that it is distinctively Reformed. It is a *development* of Reformed theology rather than a *departure* from it. By focusing on Arminius's doctrine of predestination and its differences with both Calvin and post-Dort Calvinism, people have emphasized Arminius's differences with Calvin and the Reformed tradition rather than his similarities with them. Both Arminians and Calvinists have thought of Arminius's theology as essentially a reaction against Reformed theology rather than the self-consciously Reformed

9. See, e.g., H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill, 1958), 2:349-57.

10. Carl Bangs, "Arminius and Reformed Theology" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1958), 23.

11. *Ibid.*, 14.

theology that it is.<sup>12</sup> Wilhelm Pauck has correctly described Arminius's theology as an outgrowth of Reformed theology, rather than a polemic against it: "Indeed, there are many Calvinist theological traditions. The Reformed theologies of the Swiss, the German, the French, the Dutch, the Scotch, etc., are not so uniform as the theologies of the various Lutheran bodies are. The Arminians belong as definitely to the Calvinistic tradition as the defenders of the decisions of the Synod of Dort."<sup>13</sup> Those who see predestination as the essential core of Reformed or Augustinian-Calvinistic theology find it easy to say that, since Arminius did not articulate predestination in the same way Calvin did, he is a semi-Pelagian. Then they transfer this alleged semi-Pelagianism to all of his theology.<sup>14</sup> Generations of theological students have received this picture of Arminius. But this approach is simply wrongheaded. It fails to take Arminius's theology seriously and writes him off without a hearing.

The best way to understand Arminius, and thus to benefit from his unique and substantial contribution to Protestant theology, is to understand his theological context. That context consisted of his stated view of Reformed theology (specifically that of Calvin), his confessional beliefs, and his published writings. If one believes Arminius to be an honest man, rather than a "treacherous" one, one will see a picture of Arminius emerge that is radically different from the one(s) above.

12. Richard A. Muller has argued that Arminius's view of creation and providence and his intellectualism (versus voluntarism) differ somewhat from Reformed Scholasticism. This is perhaps responsible for his divergent view of predestination. See his *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991). This observation, however, does not obscure the fact that, as will be shown below, there was no consensus on predestination in the Dutch Reformed Church of Arminius's time; nor does it detract from Arminius's inherently Reformed views on Original Sin, human inability, the penal-satisfaction nature of the atonement, or the imputative nature of justification.

13. Quoted in Bangs, "Arminius and Reformed Theology," 25.

14. Muller (4) has said, "'Arminius,' 'Arminianism,' 'Dort,' and 'TULIP' are part of the common language of modern Protestantism. Nonetheless, the fame of Arminius' views on this one issue [predestination] has only served to obscure the larger, general outlines of his theology and to conceal utterly the positive relationships that existed between Arminius' thought and method and the intellectual life of post-Reformation Protestantism." This paper will not deal with Arminius's doctrine of predestination; his views on the subject are well-known. Rather, this essay will seek to correct misinterpretations of Arminius's views of Original Sin, human inability, the nature of atonement, and justification. These are doctrines that have been assumed by Calvinists and Arminians alike as basically those that were later articulated by Remonstrants and Wesleyans—a more semi-Pelagian, synergistic, works-oriented view of sin and salvation. There is no doubt that Arminius differed from Calvin on the details of predestination, the irresistibility of grace, and the perseverance of the saints—and with later Calvinists on the extent of the atonement. This fact, however, should not be taken as proof that Arminius, like most later Arminians, held to a weak view of Original Sin and human inability, a governmental view of the atonement, a non-imputative view of justification, and a works-oriented view of perseverance.

## ARMINIUS'S CONTEXT

An awareness of the theological situation in the Dutch Reformed Church before and during Arminius's lifetime greatly enhances one's understanding of his theology. Most interpretations of it have been based on misconceptions about Arminius's situation.<sup>15</sup> Bangs mentions six misconceptions that are common among interpreters of Arminius:<sup>16</sup> (1) that Arminius was reared and educated amidst Calvinism in a Calvinist country; (2) that his education at the Universities of Leiden and Basel confirmed his acceptance of Genevan Calvinism; (3) that as a student of Theodore Beza he accepted supralapsarianism; (4) that, while a pastor in Amsterdam, he was commissioned to write a refutation of the humanist Dirck Coornheert, who derided the Calvinist view of election and said that the doctrine of Original Sin could not be found in Scripture;<sup>17</sup> (5) that while preparing his refutation, he changed his mind and defected to Coornheert's humanism;<sup>18</sup> and (6) that thus his theology was a polemic against Reformed theology. None of these six points, as Bangs has shown, is true.<sup>19</sup>

Arminius was not predisposed to a supralapsarian view of predestination. He rather shared the views of numerous Reformed theologians and pastors before him. He was not reared in a "Calvinist country." A brief look at the Reformed Church in the sixteenth century will reveal this. The origins of the Reformed Church were diverse, both historically and theologically. When Calvin came out with his views on predestination in the 1540s, many within the Reformed Church reacted strongly. When Sabastien Castellio exhibited disagreement with Calvin's view of predestination, he was banished from Geneva. Yet the Reformed in Basel gave him asylum and soon offered him a professorship there. It was said that, in Basel, "if one wishes to scold another, he calls him a Calvinist."<sup>20</sup> Another Reformed theologian who reacted negatively to Calvin's doctrine of predestination was Jerome Bolsec, who settled in Geneva in 1550. When Calvin and Beza sent a list of Bolsec's errors to the Swiss churches, they were disappointed with the response. The Church of Basel urged that Calvin and Bolsec try to emphasize their similarities rather than their

15. The background information in this section is taken from Bangs, "Arminius and the Reformation," 155-60.

16. These misconceptions arise from the Peter Bertius's funeral oration for Arminius and Caspar Brandt's *Life of James Arminius*.

17. Bangs, "Arminius and the Reformation," 156.

18. *Ibid.*

19. See Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 141-42.

20. Bangs, "Arminius and the Reformation," 157.

differences. The ministers of Bern reminded Calvin of the many biblical texts that refer to God's universal grace. Even Bullinger disagreed with Calvin, though he later changed his mind. Bangs notes that the German-speaking cantons provided most of the resistance to Calvinist predestinarianism,<sup>21</sup> but even in Geneva, there was a fair amount of resistance. This is evidenced by the presence of the liberal Calvinist Charles Perrot on the faculty of the University of Geneva, even during Beza's lifetime.

"From the very beginnings of the introduction of Reformed religion in the Low Countries," says Bangs, "the milder views of the Swiss cantons were in evidence."<sup>22</sup> Because of Roman Catholic persecution, the first Dutch Reformed synod was held at the Reformed church in Emden (later called "the Mother Church of the Churches of God"), where Albert Hardenberg was pastor. Hardenberg, who was closer to Philip Melancthon than to Calvin on predestination, had great influence on the early leaders in the Dutch Reformed Church—most notably Clement Martenson and John Isbrandtson, who openly opposed the introduction of Genevan theology into the Low Countries.<sup>23</sup> The Synod of Emden adopted the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession of Faith. Both of these documents allowed room for disagreement on the doctrine of predestination, but some ministers who had been educated in Geneva began attempts to enforce a supralapsarian interpretation of them.

Soon there arose two parties in the Dutch Reformed Church. Those who were less inclined to a Calvinistic view of predestination inclined more toward a form of Erastianism and toleration toward Lutherans and Anabaptists. The Genevan elements, however, wanted strict adherence to Calvinism and Presbyterian church government. It turns out that the lay magistrates and lay people tended toward the former, while more clergy tended toward the latter. However, a significant number of clergy clung to the non-Calvinistic view of predestination. As late as 1581, Jasper Koolhaes, a Reformed pastor in Leiden, after being declared a heretic by the provincial Synod of Dort because of his non-Calvinistic interpretation of predestination, was supported by the magistrates at Leiden.<sup>24</sup> The provincial Synod of Haarlem of 1582 excommunicated him, along with the magistrates and some ministers of Leiden. The Hague, Dort, and Gouda opposed this action. The Synod also attempted to force the Dutch churches to accept a rigid doctrine of predestination but did not succeed.

21. *Ibid.*, 158.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, 159.

24. Koolhaes taught at the University of Leiden while Arminius was a student there. The first rigid predestinarian did not teach at the University until the arrival of Lambert Daneau.

Koolhaes continued to write, and the States of Holland and Leiden magistrates backed him. A compromise between the two factions proved unsuccessful. Thus there were mixed opinions on the doctrine of predestination in the Dutch Reformed Church when Arminius was coming of age as a theologian.<sup>25</sup>

#### ARMINIUS, THE CONFESSIONS, AND CALVIN

Within this historical context Arminius worked out his Reformed theology. As a devout Dutch Reformed theologian, Arminius was loyal to the symbols of his church: the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession of Faith. On numerous occasions he reaffirmed his faithfulness to these documents. Under the attack of the consistory in Amsterdam in 1593, Arminius felt it necessary to affirm his loyalty to the Catechism and Confession. He repeatedly reaffirmed this loyalty, as in 1605, when he responded to deputies of the Synods of North and South Holland.<sup>26</sup> In 1607, at the meeting of the Preparatory Convention for the National Synod, Arminius and some other delegates argued that the church's rule of faith and practice should be the Scriptures, not the confession or the Catechism, emphasizing the priority of the Word of God over the confessions. Arminius, among others, suggested that the documents should be open to revision by the Synod, to clarify certain doctrines (e.g., the use of the plural when discussing Original Sin in the Catechism). This did not mean, however, that Arminius disagreed with anything the documents said. Arminius made this clear in a letter to the Palatine Ambassador, Hippolytus a Collibus, in 1608: "I confidently declare that I have never taught anything, either in the church or in the university, which contravenes the sacred writings that ought to be with us the sole rule of thinking and of speaking, or which is opposed to the Belgic Confession or to the Heidelberg Catechism, that are our stricter formularies of consent."<sup>27</sup> In his *Declaration of Sentiments* that same year, Arminius challenged anyone to prove that he had ever said anything "in conflict with either the Word of God or the Confession of the Dutch Churches."<sup>28</sup> Arminius lived and died with complete loyalty to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession of Faith. It is hard to believe that one would consistently lie both in public statements and in

25. *Ibid.*, 160.

26. Carl Bangs, "Arminius As a Reformed Theologian," in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. John H. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 216.

27. Quoted in *ibid.*, 217.

28. *Ibid.*

published writing after published writing when it would have been much easier to open a distillery, as Koolhaes did, or enter some other occupation that was less psychically strenuous. If Arminius was not a “dishonest,” “surreptitious,” “treacherous” man, one confidently believes that he was a loyal defender of the symbols of his church to his dying day.

In light of the fact that most interpreters have cast Arminius as a foe of Calvin, Arminius’s statements on Calvin are most interesting. Arminius made explicit references to Calvin throughout his writings, and quoted Calvin a great deal—most of the time positively. Arminius had a high regard for Calvin as an exegete and theologian. His only important disagreement with Calvin centered on the particulars of the doctrine of predestination. Arminius did not, however, think predestination was the essential core of either Reformed theology or Calvin’s theology. Arminius expressed his high regard for Calvin in a letter to the Amsterdam Burgomaster Sebastian Egbertszoon in May of 1607. The occasion of the letter was a rumor that Arminius had been recommending the words of the Jesuits and of Coornheert to his students. Arminius says:

So far from this, after the reading of Scripture, which I strenuously inculcate, and more than any other (as the whole university, indeed, the conscience of my colleagues will testify) I recommend that the *Commentaries* of Calvin be read, whom I extol in higher terms than Helmichius . . . himself, as he owned to me, ever did. For I affirm that in the interpretation of the Scriptures Calvin is incomparable, and that his *Commentaries* are more to be valued than anything that is handed down to us in the writings of the Fathers—so much so that I concede to him a certain spirit of prophecy in which he stands distinguished above others, above most, indeed, above all. His *Institutes*, so far as respects Commonplaces, I give out to be read after the [Heidelberg] Catechism. . . . But here I add—with discrimination, as the writings of all men ought to be read.<sup>29</sup>

In his *Declaration of Sentiments* to the States of Holland, in declaration nine, “The Justification of Man before God,” Arminius sets forth his doctrine of justification and then says, in essence, that if he is wrong, then Calvin too must be wrong: “Whatever interpretation may be put upon these expressions, none of our divines blames Calvin or considers him to be heterodox on this point; yet my opinion is not so widely different from

29. Quoted in Bangs, “Arminius As a Reformed Theologian,” 216.

his as to prevent me from employing the signature of my own hand in subscribing to those things which he has delivered on this subject, in the third book of his *Institutes*; this I am prepared to do at any time, and to give them my full approval."<sup>30</sup> Arminius's opinion of Calvin in these passages does not sound like that of an antagonist but rather like one who has great respect for Calvin and is in agreement with him on most things. It is a mistake to exaggerate the importance of the doctrine of predestination to the point that it is the only doctrine that matters. Though Arminius differed with Calvin on this doctrine, he was, and believed he was, consistently Reformed.

An examination of Arminius's historical and theological context, his confessional loyalties, and his opinion of Calvin does a great deal to establish his theological position. However, the final court of appeal will be his writings. An analysis of his doctrinal works will show that Arminius was in essential agreement with the Augustinian, Calvinistic, and Reformed expressions of the faith. It will show that he can in no sense be described as semi-Pelagian or synergistic, much less out-and-out Pelagian. Rather, we will see that Arminius articulated the reality of Original Sin and the necessity of divine grace just as strongly as any Calvinist, though in a different way.

#### ARMINIUS AND ORIGINAL SIN

Arminius's doctrine of Original Sin has been the source of a great deal of confusion. He has usually been associated with semi-Pelagianism and sometimes with outright Pelagianism. Most writers, both Arminian and Calvinist, have dissociated Arminius and his theology from that of Augustine. An investigation of his theological writings, however, reveals that he held an Augustinian view of Original Sin.

Before examining Arminius's writings, it will be beneficial to investigate his confessional beliefs. As was indicated above, Arminius stated on many occasions his agreement with the Dutch Reformed confessions of his day: the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism. A look at the Heidelberg Catechism will reveal the Reformed hamartiology that characterized Arminius's theology. Questions seven, eight, and ten of the Catechism read:

Q. 7. *Where, then, does this corruption of human nature come from?*

30. James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 1:700. Arminius's doctrine of justification will be dealt with later in the essay.

A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden; whereby our human life is so poisoned that we are all conceived and born in the state of sin.

Q. 8. *But are we so perverted that we are altogether unable to do good and prone to do evil?*

A. Yes, unless we are born again through the Spirit of God.

Q. 10. *Will God let man get by with such disobedience and defection?*

A. Certainly not, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, both against our in-born sinfulness and our actual sins, and he will punish them accordingly in his righteous judgment in time and eternity, as he has declared: "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, and do them."<sup>31</sup>

The Belgic Confession of Faith, in article fifteen, *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, says: "We believe that by the disobedience of Adam original sin has been spread through the whole human race. It is a corruption of all nature—an inherited depravity which even infects small infants in their mother's womb. . . . Therefore we reject the error of the Pelagians who say that this sin is nothing else than a matter of imitation."<sup>32</sup> Thus, if Arminius was telling the truth when he stated his agreement with the confessions of his church, the doctrines of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession of Faith may rightly be said to have been Arminius's doctrine. These confessional statements provide the context of Arminius's writings on the doctrine of sin.

Three main works in Arminius's writings outline his views on Original Sin: his *Apology against Thirty-One Theological Articles*;<sup>33</sup> his *Public Disputations* in the essays entitled "On the First Sin of the First Man" and "On Actual Sins";<sup>34</sup> and *Private Disputations*, in a disputation entitled "On the Effects of the Sin of Our First Parents."<sup>35</sup> An examination of these three works will further reveal Arminius's view of Original Sin. In his *Apology*

31. *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part 1: Book of Confessions* (New York: The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 1983), 4.005-012.

32. *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1987), 91.

33. Arminius, *Works*, 2:10-14.

34. *Ibid.*, 2:150-61.

35. *Ibid.*, 2:374-75.



against *Thirty-One Theological Articles*, Arminius argued against teachings that certain individuals had ascribed to him or his colleagues, but which neither he nor they had ever taught. In the essays on Articles thirteen and fourteen, Arminius argued against the condemnation of infants based on Original Sin; however, he stopped far short of a disavowal of Original Sin itself but rather attempted to defend his position on Reformed grounds. Arminius opened the essay with a saying that had been attributed to Borrius, but which, Arminius argued, Borrius had never said. "Original Sin will condemn no man. In every nation, all infants who die without (having committed) actual sins, are saved."<sup>36</sup> Arminius then said that Borrius denied ever having taught either statement.<sup>37</sup> Arminius's primary aim in this essay was to deny infant damnation. The doctrine of Original Sin and its imputation to the race were tangential to the argument, yet he discussed both doctrines. While disagreeing with Augustine on infant damnation, Arminius was thoroughly Augustinian on the doctrine of Original Sin. He agreed with Borrius that all infants "existed in Adam, and were by his will involved in sin and guilt."<sup>38</sup> Arminius argued that Francis Junius had agreed with Borrius that the infants of unbelievers may be saved only by "Christ and his intervention."<sup>39</sup>

Arminius discussed his views on sin in a more systematic manner in his *Public Disputations*. He summarized his doctrine of Original Sin in a section entitled "The Effects of This Sin." It is clear from this passage that Arminius was Augustinian. He stated that the violation of the law of God results in two punishments: *reatus*, a liability to two deaths—one physical and one spiritual; and *privatio*, the withdrawal of man's primitive righteousness.<sup>40</sup> Arminius believed that Adam's sin caused physical death for the entire race and spiritual death for those who are not in Christ. His position on the effect of Adam's sin on the race was that "the whole of this sin . . . is not peculiar to our first parents, but is common to the entire race and to all their posterity, who, at the time when this sin was committed, were in their loins, and who have since descended from them by the natural mode of propagation."<sup>41</sup> Arminius believed that all

36. *Ibid.*, 2:10.

37. *Ibid.*, 2:11.

38. *Ibid.*, 2:12.

39. *Ibid.*, 2:14.

40. *Ibid.*, 2:156.

41. *Ibid.* It may be inferred from this statement that Arminius would accept (in the terminology of later Protestant Scholastic theology) a "natural headship" view of the transmission of sin, rather than a "federal headship" view. Rather than Adam being "federally" appointed as head of the race, he was naturally the head of the race, and individuals are sinful as a natural consequence of their being "in Adam" or in the race.

sinned in Adam and are guilty in Adam, apart from their own actual sins. In the *Private Disputations*, Arminius echoed the sentiments of his public disputations. In disputation thirty-one, he stated that "all men, who were to be propagated from them [Adam and Eve] in a natural way, became obnoxious to death temporal and death eternal, and (*vacui*) devoid of this gift of the Holy Spirit or original righteousness."<sup>42</sup>

Arminius's views on Original Sin stand in stark contrast to the standard caricature of them, seen for example in the following quotation from Alan F. Johnson and Robert E. Webber:

The semi-Pelagian dogmas were revived again in the theology of Jacob Arminius. . . . Arminius argued that although all are sinners, they are sinners, not because they participate in Adam's sin, but because, like Adam, they sin. His theory, which came to be known as voluntary appropriated depravity, is based on the assumption that each person has an inborn bias to evil. Arminius, like the semi-Pelagians of the ancient church, wanted the responsibility of sin to rest on the individual. This doctrine of individual responsibility also extends to personal salvation.<sup>43</sup>

An examination of Arminius's confessional beliefs and his writings makes it impossible to sustain such interpretations of his doctrine of Original Sin. Another example of such misinterpretation is that of James Meeuwssen in his *Reformed Review* article on Arminianism.<sup>44</sup> Meeuwssen says that in Arminius's view of Original Sin "Adamic unity is shattered" and that Arminius's view "implies that original sin is nothing more than a habit which was eventually acquired by man."<sup>45</sup> One is led to wonder from reading Meeuwssen if he is really taking Arminius's theology

42. *Ibid.*, 2:375.

43. Alan F. Johnson and Robert E. Webber, *What Christians Believe: A Biblical and Historical Summary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 223-24.

44. Meeuwssen relies heavily on Presbyterian theologian William G. T. Shedd (*A History of Christian Doctrine* [New York: Scribner's, 1867]), who wrongly read Arminius through the lens of the works of Episcopius and other Remonstrant theologians whose theology differed significantly from that of Arminius. At one point, Meeuwssen says: "Arminius and his followers held that the imputation of actual guilt was entirely contrary to the justice and equity of God. Shedd fully agreed with such an interpretation when he paraphrased their beliefs in this way: 'Imputation is contrary to divine benevolence, right reason, in fact it is absurd and cruel'" (23). Meeuwssen then goes on to quote Episcopius for about half a page. See James Meeuwssen, "Original Arminianism and Methodistic Arminianism Compared," *Reformed Review* 14 (September 1960):21-36.

45. Meeuwssen, 22.

seriously or if he is merely reading later Arminian theologians into Arminius. Meeuwse's statements simply cannot be sustained. How can Arminius's clear statements, cited above, be reconciled with such claims? Arminius makes it quite clear that human beings deserve the punishment of God (eternal death) because of Original Sin and original guilt, not merely their own actual sin and their own actual guilt.<sup>46</sup> Meeuwse goes on to say that Arminius denies that humanity is guilty on account of Adam's sin.<sup>47</sup> But Arminius makes it clear that he does not. When asked the question, "Is the guilt of original sin taken away from all and every one by the benefits of Christ?" Arminius says that the question is "very easily answered by the distinction of the *soliciting*, *obtaining*, and the *application* of the benefits of Christ. For as the participation of Christ's benefits consists in faith alone, it follows that, if among these benefits 'deliverance from this guilt' be one, believers only are delivered from it, since they are those upon whom the wrath of God does not abide."<sup>48</sup>

Arminius's treatment of Original Sin and guilt is clearly Reformed. Again, later Arminian theology has been mistaken for Arminius's theology itself. Johnson and Webber and Meeuwse have read later theology into Arminius's theology. Only when this is done can Arminius be labeled as semi-Pelagian or Pelagian in his doctrine of Original Sin. An objective examination of either Arminius's confessional beliefs or his doctrinal writings shows that such allegations cannot be sustained.

#### ARMINIUS: SOLA GRATIA AND SOLA FIDE

With Arminius cleared of the charge of semi-Pelagianism with regards to the sinfulness of humanity, it will be beneficial to examine how he believes people may be rescued from this state of sinfulness. On the subjects of grace and faith, again interpreters have charged Arminius with holding semi-Pelagian and synergistic views that make God's foreknowledge of a person's merit the basis of redemption and that view individuals as sharing with God in their salvation. A brief look at Arminius's views of grace, free will, and human inability, followed by a more extended examination of Arminius's doctrine of justification through faith, will reveal Arminius's loyalty to Reformed theology.

Arminius believed that human beings have no ability to seek God or turn to him unless they are radically affected by his grace. Most interpreters have assumed (based on the assumption of semi-Pelagianism)

46. Arminius, *Works*, 2:374.

47. Meeuwse, 23.

48. Arminius, *Works*, 2:65.

that Arminius held a doctrine of free will that makes individuals naturally able to choose God. However, Arminius's view of human freedom does not mean freedom to do anything good in the sight of God or to choose God on one's own. For Arminius, the basic freedom that characterizes the human will is freedom from necessity. Indeed, for Arminius, "it is the very essence of the will. Without it, the will would not be the will."<sup>49</sup> This has sounded to some like semi-Pelagianism. However, though Arminius believed that the human will is free from necessity, he stated unequivocally that the will is not free from sin and its dominion: ". . . the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and (*attenuatum*) weakened; but it is also (*captivatum*) imprisoned, destroyed, and lost: And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such are excited by divine grace."<sup>50</sup> Fallen human beings have no ability or power to reach out to God on their own. Arminius explained that "the mind of man in this state is dark, destitute of the saving knowledge of God, and, according to the apostle, incapable of those things which belong to the Spirit of God."<sup>51</sup> He went on to discuss "the utter weakness of all the powers to perform that which is truly good, and to omit the perpetration of that which is evil."<sup>52</sup>

Sinful human beings, for Arminius, have free will, but this is not a free will that has within its power to do any good but is rather in bondage to sin.<sup>53</sup> The grace of God is the only power that can bring people out of this state. Arminius was not a synergist; he did not believe that individuals share with God in their salvation. Human beings are saved by grace through faith. This excludes human merit of any kind. The faith that is the instrument of justification (not the ground) cannot be had without the grace of God. Divine grace alone gives individuals the power to come to God.<sup>54</sup> Grace, for Arminius, is necessary and essential to faith from start to finish. But Arminius differed from Calvin and many Reformed theologians of his day by stating that this grace of God "which has appeared to all men" can be resisted. Arminius denied the distinction between a universal call and a special call. He insisted that the gospel call is universal. Yet, the grace of God through this call can be and is resisted by men and

49. Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, 341.

50. Arminius, *Works*, 2:192.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*, 2:193.

53. Millard J. Erickson repeats the common misunderstanding that, according to Arminius, human inability in salvation is "physical and intellectual, but not volitional." See his *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 634.

54. Arminius, *Works*, 2:194-95.

women. He said that "the whole of the controversy reduces itself to this question, 'Is the grace of God a certain irresistible force?' . . . I believe that many persons resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace that is offered."<sup>55</sup>

Though Arminius differed from Calvin and some of the Reformed on the particulars of grace, he still maintained that salvation is by *sola gratia*. Arminius can in no way be considered a semi-Pelagian or a synergist. This fact is further attested in Arminius's doctrine of justification.

Justification is another doctrine on which Arminius has been grossly misunderstood. As with the doctrines of Original Sin and grace, his doctrine of justification is usually seen through the eyes of later Arminian theology.<sup>56</sup> Many Reformed writers have harshly criticized Arminian soteriology because, by and large, it has rested on the governmental theory of atonement as articulated by the Remonstrant theologian Hugo Grotius.<sup>57</sup> If one, however, reads Arminius in light of Grotius, one misreads Arminius. To ascertain what Arminius's doctrine of justification by faith consists of, it is helpful to examine his confessional beliefs and his writings.

Arminius agrees with what the Belgic Confession says on the doctrine of justification. Article twenty-two, *Of Our Justification through Faith in Jesus Christ*, after stating that justification is "by faith alone, or faith without works," says that "we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits, and so many holy works, which he hath done for us and in our stead, is our Righteousness."<sup>58</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism establishes the Reformed view of justification by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ apprehended by faith, which follows forth from the penal satisfaction theory of atonement. The Catechism states that "God wills that his righteousness be satisfied; therefore payment in full must be made to his righteousness, either by ourselves or by another." However, we cannot make this payment ourselves. Only Jesus Christ, God incarnate, can make this payment for us. Thus, he pays the "debt of sin" and satisfies God's righteous requirements. When people have faith in Christ, they are "incorporated into [Christ] and accept all his benefits," they are in union with Christ, which means Christ bears their sins and they have the benefit of his

55. Quoted in Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, 343.

56. See, e.g., Meeuwssen, 27-28.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 204.

righteousness.<sup>59</sup> The Catechism further says, in answering question sixty, that "God, without any merit of my own, out of pure grace, grants me the benefits of the perfect expiation of Christ, imputing to me his righteousness and holiness as if I had never committed a single sin or had ever been sinful, having fulfilled myself all the obedience which Christ has carried out for me, if only I accept such favor with a trusting heart."<sup>60</sup> Question sixty-one reads:

Q. 61. *Why do you say that you are righteous by faith alone?*

A. Not because I please God by virtue of the worthiness of my faith, but because the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ alone are my righteousness before God, and because I can accept it and make it mine in no other way than by faith alone.<sup>61</sup>

This is the same conception of atonement and justification as that in the Belgic Confession. Arminius claims to agree with both these documents, and his writings are fully consonant with them.

Arminius's view of justification is summarized in article seven of disputation nineteen in his *Public Disputations*. There he stated that justification is that act by which one, "being placed before the throne of grace which is erected in Christ Jesus the Propitiation, is accounted and pronounced by God, the just and merciful Judge, righteous and worthy of the reward of righteousness, not in himself but in Christ, of grace, according to the gospel, to the praise of the righteousness and grace of God, and to the salvation of the justified person himself."<sup>62</sup> Justification for Arminius is forensic and imputative in nature. He had stated in his disputations on Original Sin that eternal, spiritual death was the punishment for sin. Like the Reformed, Arminius believed that God must punish sin with eternal death unless one meets the requirement of total righteousness before him. So he portrayed God as a judge who must sentence individuals to eternal death if they do not meet his requirements. In typical Reformed fashion, Arminius employed the analogy of "a Judge making an estimate in his own mind of the deed, and of the author of it, and according to that estimate, forming a judgment and pronouncing sentence."<sup>63</sup> The sentence pronounced on the sinner who cannot meet the

59. *Ibid.*, 307-8, 311-12.

60. *Ibid.*, 314.

61. *Ibid.*, 315.

62. Arminius, *Works*, 2:256.

63. *Ibid.*, 2:256.

requirements of divine justice is eternal death. Yet, since no one has this righteousness, it must come from someone else. It can come only from Christ. He pays the penalty for sin on the cross—"the price of redemption for sins by suffering the punishment due to them."<sup>64</sup> When individuals exhibit saving faith, they come into union with Christ; this union results in their being identified with Christ in his death and righteousness.<sup>65</sup> Hence, justification takes place when God as judge pronounces one just or righteous because he has been imputed this righteousness of Christ through faith. Arminius distinguished sharply between imputed righteousness and inherent righteousness, saying that the righteousness by which we are justified is in no way inherent, or within us, but is Christ's righteousness which is "made ours by gracious imputation."<sup>66</sup>

For Arminius, this emphasis on justice does not mitigate against God's mercy, as some later Arminians held. God never had to offer Christ for the redemption of man in the first place. If God had not made a way of satisfaction for his justice (through mercy), *then*, Arminius said, is when humanity would have truly been judged according to God's "severe and rigid estimation." Those who are under the law, Arminius argued, are judged in this severe and rigid way; those who are under grace, through faith, are *graciously* imputed the righteousness of Christ, which in turn justifies them before God the Judge.<sup>67</sup>

Arminius's enemies had charged him with teaching that we are not justified by the imputation of Christ's righteousness which is ours through faith, but that it is our faith itself which justifies us. In the *Apology against Thirty-One Defamatory Articles*, Arminius dealt with the statement his enemies had attributed to him: "The righteousness of Christ is not imputed to us for righteousness; but to believe (or the act of believing) justifies us."<sup>68</sup> Arminius's reply was that he never said that the act of faith justifies a person. He held that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer by gracious imputation *and* that our faith is imputed for righteousness. The reason he held both of these is that he believed the Apostle Paul held them both.

I say, that I acknowledge, "The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us"; because I think the same thing is contained in the following words of the Apostle, "God hath made Christ to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God

64. *Ibid.*, 1:419.

65. *Ibid.*, 2:403-4.

66. *Ibid.*, 2:257.

67. *Ibid.*, 2:256-57, 406.

68. *Ibid.*, 2:42.

in him." . . . It is said in the third verse [of Romans 4], "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness"; that is, *his believing* was thus imputed. Our brethren, therefore, do not reprehend ME, but the APOSTLE.<sup>69</sup>

Arminius thought his foes were wrong to place the two concepts in opposition to one another, since Holy Scripture does not. He argued that faith is not the *ground* or *basis* (the meritorious cause) of justification, but rather the instrument *through which* one is imputed the merits of Christ (the instrumental cause).<sup>70</sup> Faith is necessary for Christ's righteousness to be imputed, and Arminius did not see a necessary opposition between the phrases "the righteousness of Christ imputed to us" and "faith imputed for righteousness."

Arminius's view of justification by grace through faith by the imputed merit of Jesus Christ was thoroughly Reformed. In another place, to clear himself of any misunderstanding, Arminius stated his full agreement with what Calvin said with regard to justification in his *Institutes*: Calvin said:

We are justified before God solely by the intercession of Christ's righteousness. This is equivalent to saying that man is not righteous in himself but because the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation. . . . You see that our righteousness is not in us but in Christ, that we possess it only because we are partakers in Christ; indeed, with him we possess all its riches.<sup>71</sup>

This phrase is almost identical to many of Arminius's statements on justification in the *Public Disputations*.

#### CONCLUSION

An investigation of Arminius's writings shows that his theology must be cleared of the charge of semi-Pelagianism, Pelagianism, and synergism. For Arminius, humanity is dead in trespasses and sin, guilty before God, and can only be saved by *sola gratia* and through *sola fide*.

This examination of Arminius's historical and theological context in Reformation-era Holland, his loyalty to the Dutch Reformed Confessions,

69. *Ibid.*, 2:43-45.

70. *Ibid.*, 2:49-51.

71. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:753.



his stated views of Calvin, and, most importantly, his writings has shown that Arminius's essential theology of sin and redemption was thoroughly Reformed. Most interpreters of Arminius have viewed him in light of later Arminianism, most of which has tended toward a denial of the Reformed view of Original Sin and total depravity and an espousal of synergism in the plan of salvation, the governmental view of atonement, and perfectionism. It has been shown that it is irresponsible simply to read these later Arminian themes back into Arminius just because his name is attached to the Arminian theological systems. A thorough analysis of Arminius's theology itself reveals that it was more a development of Reformed theology than a departure from it.

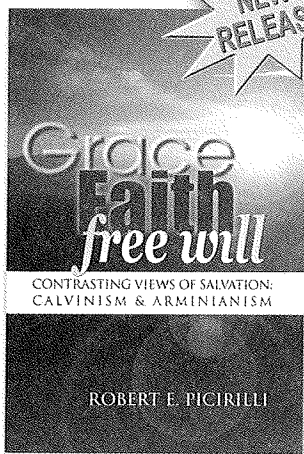
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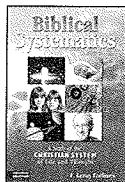
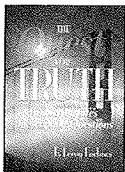


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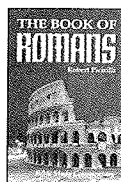
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# The Church Fathers and Baptism

## INTRODUCTION

For four hundred years after Calvary, questions regarding the Trinity and the two natures of Christ so absorbed the attention of the church that other less pressing questions were often left unanswered. While theologians were hammering out solutions to monumental concerns such as the relationship of Father to Son, the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, and a growing number of heresies, the more mundane questions of baptism, ordination, and even salvation were relegated to a back burner and largely ignored. When one becomes aware that the first question, that of the assumed subordination of the Son to the Father, was not adequately answered until the Council of Nicea in 325,<sup>1</sup> it should come as no surprise that the New Testament canon was not completed until the mid-fourth century,<sup>2</sup> that the first written creed did not appear until 325,<sup>3</sup> or that the idea of Original Sin was not clearly defined until the beginning of the third century in the writings of Tertullian, a North African theologian.

Numbers of factors contributed to this slow evolution of theological thought for the new church. One of the most difficult barriers to the development of an official statement of faith for the church was the simple fact that while the New Testament contained a wealth of divine truth, it was not a theological textbook. Centuries would pass before the term "Trinity" would indicate its full theological content, or a doctrine of

1. From Irenaeus (ca. 185) to Arius (320) the church fathers had assumed that the Son was in some sense less than the Father. Jesus himself had suggested that the Father had knowledge to which he was not privy, and all were aware that Jesus had implied subordination in his prayer in the garden, "Not my will, Father, but yours." Tertullian (200-225) determined that the Logos had been present with the Father from the beginning but that in God's great economy there was no need for the Son until he was called upon for creation. See Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* (chs. 9, 12, 14), in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 3:603-10. (This set hereafter cited as ANF.) In chapter fourteen Tertullian speaks of Christ as "second" from the Father. The problem of relationship finally was solved when, in 325, the Council of Nicea determined Christ to be consubstantial and coequal with the Father.

2. In the year 367 in his 39th *Festal Letter* (letters written each year by the Bishop of Alexandria to announce the date of Easter) Athanasius marked the 27 books that constitute the New Testament as "canonical" or authoritative Scripture. See Athanasius, *Festal Letters*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 14 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 4:552. (This set hereafter cited as NPNF2.)

3. The Nicene Creed was the first formal creed adopted by the church at large. Local creeds were present before that time but none were designed to serve the entire church.

salvation by grace through faith was fleshed out, or the Savior would be proclaimed as the perfect God-man.

But there were other hindering factors as well. Theologians worked in isolation far from the counsel and guidance of others who were searching for truth in the Word. With none of the advantages available to twenty-first century scholars—no telephones, no fax machines, no Internet, no high-flying jet planes—a Cyprian in Carthage would have little contact with an Origen in far away Alexandria. The first significant council was not held until 314.<sup>4</sup> The lack of networking and collaboration allowed new ideas to circulate through the church with no provision for testing. Errors were generated and then perpetuated as they passed from mouth to mouth. In many cases, years would pass before the church found either the time or the motivation to deal with those errors that were less evident and less than universal in their impact.

The larger problem, of course, was that of the lack of a universally-approved canon. Numbers of Christian writings were available by the early second century, and others would be added as the centuries passed. Some of these—*The Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Didache*, Tertullian's works—would assume a level of authority that rivaled the literature of the apostles. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen accepted the *Shepherd* as Scripture,<sup>5</sup> and it was still read devotionally in the churches even after it was rejected as part of the canon. With no official biblical boundaries and few theological guidelines, errors were to be expected, and progress was destined to be slow and painful. It was in this undefined environment that the question of baptism would first be considered. For the most part, early concern focused not on the mode or the moment of baptism but rather on its purpose.

#### BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

##### *Setting the Stage for Confusion*

It is not difficult to understand how the early church fathers misconstrued the New Testament's teaching on baptism. A growing awareness of the reality of Original Sin could easily lead to a reading of Scripture that favored baptism for infants, and numerous passages in those New Testament letters accepted early as inspired at least implied the possibility of baptismal regeneration.

4. The Synod of Arles met in 314. It was the first time that the church sought solution to internal problems through the consensus of its clergy and spiritual leaders.

5. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, s.v. "Hermas, Shepherd of," by Michael W. Holmes.

Peter set the stage in one of the first messages presented to the new church. Reminding his audience that they should be baptized "for the remission of their sins" (Acts 2:38), Peter planted an idea that would become "gospel" in the first century after the New Testament. While later scholars would note that repentance, "for" (Greek *eis*) could be translated "in" (Acts 8:16; 19:5) or "because of,"<sup>6</sup> the early fathers were not so sophisticated in their own interpretation of Scripture. Repentance, remission, and baptism would become inexorably linked in the minds of those who were to create new literature for the church in the centuries that followed the apostles and the New Testament. Other statements by Peter, even with accompanying interpretation, only added to the confusion. In 1 Peter 3:21, the apostle declared, "There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."<sup>7</sup>

Peter was not the only model. The writer of Hebrews declared that, "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (10:22), we should draw near to God with "a true heart in full assurance of faith" and that we should hold steadfastly to our profession of faith in Christ. Finally, Paul's instructions to Titus at least inferred that baptism was linked to regeneration: "But according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (3:5).

### *Finding the Balance*

Had the early Fathers looked more carefully, they might have avoided error in their attempts at "doing a theology" for the church. A wealth of information in the Scripture gives the balance to the question of baptism's role in the salvation experience.

Just one chapter after his powerful message at Pentecost, Peter defined the plan of salvation without reference to baptism. Preaching to a Jewish audience from Solomon's Porch, Peter simply demanded that those who had been responsible for the death of the Messiah repent of

6. In his notes on this perplexing problem, A. T. Robertson concluded, "My view is decidedly against the idea that Peter, Paul, or any one in the New Testament taught baptism as essential to the remission of sins or the means of securing such remission. So I understand Peter to be urging baptism on each of them who had already turned (repented) and for it to be done in the name of Jesus Christ on the basis of the forgiveness of sins which they had already received." A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 3:36.

7. *The New King James Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). All Scripture references will follow this text.

authority, Christian literature before that time is strikingly silent on the subject. It is the writer's conviction that infant baptism was introduced into church practice only after Tertullian (late second and early third centuries) clearly redefined the concept of Original Sin for the new faith.<sup>11</sup>

*The Didache* or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (variously dated as early as 95 and as late as 150), the church's first manual for the daily life of the believer, required that both the administrator of baptism and the new convert spend one or two days fasting before the rite was to take place.<sup>12</sup> In fact, for the first few centuries after the New Testament, it was far more likely that baptism would be delayed rather than administered at birth.

As early as the end of the first century Hermas, in *The Shepherd*, determined that only one repentance was available to believers.<sup>13</sup> Baptism removed sins committed prior to the sacrament but did not affect those committed later. It therefore seemed the better part of wisdom to delay baptism as long as possible.

Tertullian suggested that it might be wise to postpone baptism until after marriage. "For no less cause must the unwedded also be deferred—in whom *the ground of temptation* is prepared. . . . If any understand the weighty import of baptism, they will fear its reception more than its delay."<sup>14</sup> In any case, he was skeptical of baptism for infants. Admittedly, the argument is clouded by his mention of "sponsors," a possible reference to the practice. But his statement is clear and unequivocal: "And so, according to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each

11. Amazingly, the concepts of sin and grace were a mystery to the early Fathers. It seemed as though they knew nothing of the role of the cross in God's provision for salvation. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers were characterized by legalism—careful attention to Old Testament Law—and by the importance of human merit. See Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 2:684.

12. Admittedly, infant baptism is not denied in the text, but it would seem unlikely that this first church manual would omit instructions for the baptism of children if, indeed, it was the common practice of the church. See *The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, in ANF, 7:379. Other early literature also pointed to the necessity for prior preparation for the sacrament on the part of both the administrator and the communicant. In *On Baptism* (ANF, 3:678-79) Tertullian argued, "They who are about to enter baptism ought to pray with repeated prayers, fasts, and bendings of the knee, and vigils all the night through, and with the confession of all bygone sins." Admittedly, the preparations could, in the case of infant baptism, be carried out by the sponsors, but there is no indication of such an alternative in the text.

13. Hermas mentioned Clement of Rome as his contemporary. If this information is accepted at face value, then it must be concluded that *The Shepherd* was written either late in the first century or early in the second.

14. Tertullian, *On Baptism*, ANF, 3:678.

individual, the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children."<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the best case study is found in the decision of Constantine, the Roman Emperor, to wait until his deathbed to agree to baptism. This common practice assured that no subsequent sins could hinder the believer in his quest for heaven.

#### THE MODE OF BAPTISM

In his study of baptism in the early church, Philip Schaff concluded that trine immersion was the typical pattern followed by the clergy. "The immersion consisted in thrice dipping the head of the candidate who stood nude in the water."<sup>16</sup> Numerous early texts offered instructions for the observance of baptism that would support Schaff's findings. Though *The Didache* introduced the first evidence of the church's willingness to compromise on the immersion tradition, it clearly suggested that the original mode was preferred. They simply were now willing to negotiate when expedience demanded flexibility.

Baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost in living (running water). But if thou hast not living water, baptize into other water; and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou has neither, pour water upon the head thrice, into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.<sup>17</sup>

A later church manual, *The Apostolic Constitutions*, continued to prefer immersion.<sup>18</sup> For the first time, the author seemed to infer that the water symbolized death. If that is true, then this could suggest that not all of the early literature taught the necessity of baptism for salvation. In any case, immersion was required. After the mention of the Father and the Holy Spirit, the writer reminded his readers that the "descent into the water" marked death with Christ and that the "ascent out of the water" was public evidence of "rising again with Him."<sup>19</sup>

15. Ibid.

16. Schaff, *History*, 2:248.

17. *The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, ANF, 7:379.

18. *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, ANF, 7:431. It is assumed that this work is a compilation of instructions that cover a long period of time with different chapters bearing different dates. No clear conclusion has been drawn as to the author of the text.

19. Ibid.

Like Tertullian and others, *The Constitutions* was more concerned with preparation for baptism than with the mode or, indeed, with the age required for baptism. Where Tertullian gave primary attention to prayers and rituals, this later church manual was more concerned with character and evidence of repentance.

But let him that is to be baptized be free from all iniquity; one that has left off to work sin, the friend of God, the enemy of the devil, the heir of God the Father, the fellow-heir of His Son; one that has renounced Satan, and the demons, and Satan's deceits; chaste, pure, holy, beloved of God, the son of God, praying as a son to his father.<sup>20</sup>

#### THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM

##### *Hermas*

As early as the end of the first century, Hermas, a former slave, had begun to suggest a close link between baptism and the forgiveness of sins. In *The Shepherd of Hermas* (sometimes called *The Pastor of Hermas*), the author tells of a vision in which an old lady (a personification of the church) reveals how the church is to be built. The vision focuses on a tower that is in the process of construction. The tower is built upon water and some stones brought out of the water are fitted into place without adjustment while others are found on the land and have to be cut and shaped before they can become part of the structure. Others are broken or are found to be too short and some are thrown far away from the tower. The old woman reminded Hermas that the perfect stones drawn from the water represent the apostles, bishops, and martyrs of the church, and these are worthy to be included in the building. They have been purified in the water. Those set aside but left near the tower are those who are not yet worthy because of their sin but who wish to repent, while those who have been thrown far away are beyond the reach of the church and redemption. Hermas surely wished to remind his readers here that believers were allowed only one repentance after baptism, but hidden in his story was the introduction of an idea that was to have a far greater impact on the continuing church. When Hermas asked the old woman why the tower was built on the water, her response was, "Hear then why the tower was built upon the waters. It is because your life has been, and

20. *Ibid.*, 431.



will be, saved through water."<sup>21</sup> The seed was now planted and would grow into full flower by the end of the early church period.

### *Justin Martyr*

Baptism had begun to take on a new identity as early as 165, when Justin Martyr inferred that the waters of baptism offered both forgiveness and regeneration. Like his colleagues, his sense of sin and grace was less than sophisticated, and error could prove to be as much the rule as the exception. In his *Apology* he defined his understanding of the rite of baptism. After prayer and fasting both by the administrator and the candidate, baptism is offered.

Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, "Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."<sup>22</sup>

Of course, the problem here could be traced to the historian's presupposition and bias mentioned earlier. Perspective on the meaning and role of regeneration in the salvation process could cloud contemporary interpretation of Justin's text.<sup>23</sup> But while he clearly indicates that the prayer and fasting that precede baptism play a part in the remission of sin, he also clearly relates "washing with water" to the new birth in his attempt to define baptism. Later in the same discourse, he again assigns a strong effect to baptism by reaffirming his conviction that baptism includes "washing" and by declaring that the ceremony offers spiritual illumination to the believer. "And this washing is called illumination, because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understandings."<sup>24</sup>

### *The Apostolic Tradition*

Current scholarship ascribes the writing of *The Apostolic Tradition* to Hippolytus at the end of the second century. It offers by far the most exhaustive instructions for baptism in early church literature. In the light

21. *The Pastor of Hermas*, ANF, 2:12-19.

22. *The First Apology of Justin*, Chapter LXI, "Christian Baptism," ANF, 1:183.

23. The author's commitment to an Arminian "order of salvation process" necessarily flavors his interpretation at this point. A Calvinist would have no difficulty with the suggestion that regeneration precedes salvation.

24. *First Apology of Justin*, ANF, 1:183.

of ongoing persecution by the empire, it is not surprising that new candidates for baptism were to be examined to determine their motives for seeking entry into the Christian faith. Hippolytus informs his readers that the initial period for instruction for new believers is at least three years. Baptism was preferably administered during the celebration of Easter, and those chosen to be involved in the ceremony were classified as *electi*. On the Saturday night before Easter, the local bishop “. . . gives them a definitive exorcism” and the “night is spent in vigil, with Scripture reading and instruction.”<sup>25</sup> Trine baptism was administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and afterwards, “the newly baptized dry themselves and dress, and then enter the main assembly. There the bishop lays hands on them, praying, ‘O Lord God, who didst grant these the forgiveness of sins by the bath of regeneration of the Holy Spirit, send upon them thy grace, that they may serve thee according to thy will.’”<sup>26</sup>

### *Tertullian*

Tertullian gave something of a magical character to the waters of baptism. In a section entitled, “The Primeval Hovering of the Spirit of God over the Waters Typical of Baptism,” this early church father (ca. 195-225) suggested that the Holy Spirit prepares the font for the rite of baptism.

Thus the nature of the waters, sanctified by the Holy One, itself conceived withal the power of sanctifying. . . . All waters, therefore, in virtue of their pristine privilege of their origin, do, after invocation of God, attain the sacramental power of sanctification; for the Spirit immediately supervenes from the heavens, and rests over the waters, sanctifying them for Himself.<sup>27</sup>

In an extended section entitled “Of the Necessity of Baptism to Salvation,” he argued with his detractors who denied the essential nature of baptism using examples of those who had failed to attain baptism—characters from the Old Testament and the apostles of Christ. Concluding a study on heretical baptism, he rejoiced in the efficacy of the Christian rite. “Happy water, which once washes away; which does not mock sinners (with vain hopes); which does not, by being infected with the repetition of impurities, again defile them whom it has washed!”<sup>28</sup> For

25. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, s.v. “Baptism, Baptismal Rites,” by Geoffrey Wainwright. Hippolytus, Tertullian, and others suggested that Easter was an appropriate time for baptism.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Tertullian, *On Baptism*, ANF, 3:670.

28. *Ibid.*, 676.

Tertullian, even though he could argue for delay and could demand repentance as a prerequisite, baptism was an essential ceremony that in some mystical way aided in the removal of sin.

### *Cyprian*

Cyprian served the church in the same area of North Africa that Tertullian had called home. Carthage and Alexandria had become powerful Christian centers and, through leaders like Tertullian, Cyprian, Clement, and Origen, had contributed significantly to the growing body of theological dogma that continued to shape the church. Like Tertullian, Cyprian understood baptism to include the removal of past sins. In a letter to Donatus, after admitting that he had struggled with sin over a long period of time, he contrasted that earlier experience with his present, postbaptismal victory over sin. "But after that [his earlier slavery to sin], by the help of the water of new birth, the stain of former years had been washed away, and a light from above, serene and pure, had been infused into my reconciled heart."<sup>29</sup> But unlike Tertullian, Cyprian called for infant baptism, assuming that God's grace is supplied through the ceremony. Even so, his strongest statement on the necessity of baptism, and maybe the strongest that the early Fathers offered, reminded the believer that it was through this rite that the Spirit was given.

"He that believeth on me," as the Scripture saith, "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." And that it might be more evident that the Lord is speaking there, not of the cup, but of baptism, the Scripture adds, saying, "But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive." For by baptism the Holy Spirit is received; and thus by those who are baptized, and have attained the Holy Spirit, is attained the drinking of the Lord's cup.<sup>30</sup>

### BAPTISM AND THE LATER FATHERS

The church would continue to feel the impact of the teaching of the early fathers as later writers tended to define and refine earlier theology rather than create a newer dogma of their own. Schaff concluded that Gregory Nazianzen, a champion of the Nicene Creed in the mid-fourth century, envisioned in baptism most of the benefits offered through salvation—"forgiveness of sins, the new birth, and the restoration of the

29. Cyprian, *The Epistles of Cyprian*, ANF, 5:276.

30. *Ibid.*, (Epistle 62), 360.

divine image."<sup>31</sup> In this case, infant baptism was assumed, and it was considered to be a "seal of grace and a consecration to the service of God."<sup>32</sup> The idea of covenant relationship to Christ and to the church would be fleshed out much later. Gregory of Nyssa, Schaff asserted, taught that infant baptism restored the child to the paradise from which Adam had been removed. But the task of clearly defining the church's dogma on baptism would be left to Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century.

### *Augustine*

By the fifth century and Augustine's moment in history, infant baptism was the order of the day. Origen had long since declared the practice to be apostolic both in its character and in its heritage. But delay of baptism until maturity or even until the imminent onset of death was still attractive to many. The church found it difficult to dispose of the baggage that it had brought over from the days of the Apostolic Fathers. Augustine himself was not baptized until after his conversion experience even though his mother, Monica, was a believer.<sup>33</sup>

But Augustine's conviction overshadowed his experience. Though he had the good grace to assign a lesser punishment to infants who died apart from the benefit of baptism, he had no qualms about condemning them on the basis of their guilt through Original Sin. Admitting that "it may therefore be correctly affirmed, that such infants as quit the body without being baptized will be involved in the mildest condemnation of all,"<sup>34</sup> he nevertheless offered them no hope for salvation.

Salvation was offered to infants who enjoyed the privilege of baptism, but since the child had not yet willfully committed sin, remission was limited to the guilt of Original Sin. While theologians could not be sure that baptism offered the same grace to infants as to adults, they largely assumed that saving grace was administered along with the water of the ceremony.<sup>35</sup>

The final conclusion must be that Augustine perpetuated the church's conviction that baptism was a necessary element in the salvation process, that regeneration was an integral part of the whole. Schaff

31. Schaff, *History*, 3:481.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Schaff (*History*, 3:990) described Augustine's mother as "one of the noblest women in the history of Christianity, of a highly intellectual and spiritual cast, of fervent piety, most tender affection, and all-conquering love."

34. Augustine, *On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. First Series, 14 vol. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 5:22-23.

35. See Schaff, *History*, 3:483.

concluded that it was Augustine who established the pattern for later medieval Roman Catholicism.

In Augustine we already find all the germs of the scholastic and Catholic doctrine of baptism. . . . According to this view, baptism is the sacrament of regeneration, . . . the means of the forgiveness of sin, that is, both of original sin and of actual sins committed before baptism (*not after it*).<sup>36</sup>

### *Gregory the Great*

The medieval church read Augustine through the eyes of Gregory the Great. Even a cursory reading in Gregory's epistles reveals the shadow of the theologian of Hippo in the background. It is not surprising then to discover the dogma of baptismal regeneration reaffirmed in the new Roman Catholic church.<sup>37</sup> In fact, though Gregory regrettably often misread the earlier theologian, at the point of baptism he is more Augustinian than Augustine himself. Arguing against those who suggest that baptism cleanses the believer only superficially, he posited the idea of absolution from all past sins in baptismal waters. Using Israel's Red Sea experience as an analogy, he forcefully made his point.

For certainly the passage of the Red Sea was a figure of holy baptism, in which the enemies behind died, but others were found in front in the wilderness. And so to all who are bathed in holy baptism all their past sins are remitted, since their sins die behind them even as did the Egyptian enemies. But in the wilderness we find other enemies, since, while we live in this life, before reaching the country of promise, many temptations harass us, and hasten to bar our way as we are wending to the land of the living. Whosoever says, then, that sins are not entirely put away in baptism, let him say that the Egyptians did not really die in the Red Sea. But, if he acknowledges that the Egyptians really died, he must needs acknowledge that sins die entirely in baptism, since surely the truth avails more in our absolution than the shadow of the truth.<sup>38</sup>

36. Schaff, *History*, 3:482.

37. The author dates, somewhat arbitrarily, the founding of an official Roman Catholic church at the beginning of the seventh century during the reign of Gregory the Great. From about 604, the church of Rome can be identified as the "church of churches" and Gregory as the "bishop of bishops."

38. NPNF2, 13:66.

Finally, pointing back to Jesus and the washing of the disciples' feet in John 13, Gregory argued that Christ's words to Peter, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean" (John 13:10), could be applied to baptism as well. "Nothing, then, of the contagion of sin remains to him whom He Himself who redeemed him declares him to be every whit clean."<sup>39</sup>

#### BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

By the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451, the church had defined the nature, content, and character of orthodoxy and had largely answered the major questions that had hindered unity and growth in the church in earlier centuries. Decisions made during these early struggles for identity would, for the most part, guide the church, both Catholic and Protestant, into the latter years of the second millennium. Few saw fit to question the church's understanding of the Trinity or the deity of Christ. But other dogmas, specifically those related to salvation and baptism, continued to shape and reshape the church over the next centuries. The church, since Cyprian, had been commissioned as the channel of God's grace, and baptism outside the church could not be imagined. Augustine's concern for Original Sin would be addressed in the requirement for infant baptism which promised the remission of all sin prior to the ceremony, while his doctrines of election and predestination were subsumed by the church in the assumption that church membership was equal to salvation. To be elect was to be Catholic. Unfortunately, the church also made room for Pelagius's conviction that man could be saved by his good works.<sup>40</sup> Through an efficacious baptism that removed earlier sin man now was capable of meeting the requirements of the church in attending the sacraments. The result for the medieval church was either a Semi-Pelagian or a Semi-Augustinian flavor, since either would allow for the wedding of the two theological schools of thought. In any case, the church embraced all the baptized within its purview and assumed their salvation through their relationship to Catholic baptism and to the church.

And the story did not stop with medieval Catholicism. Though Zwingli could speak of the sacraments, both baptism and the Supper, as

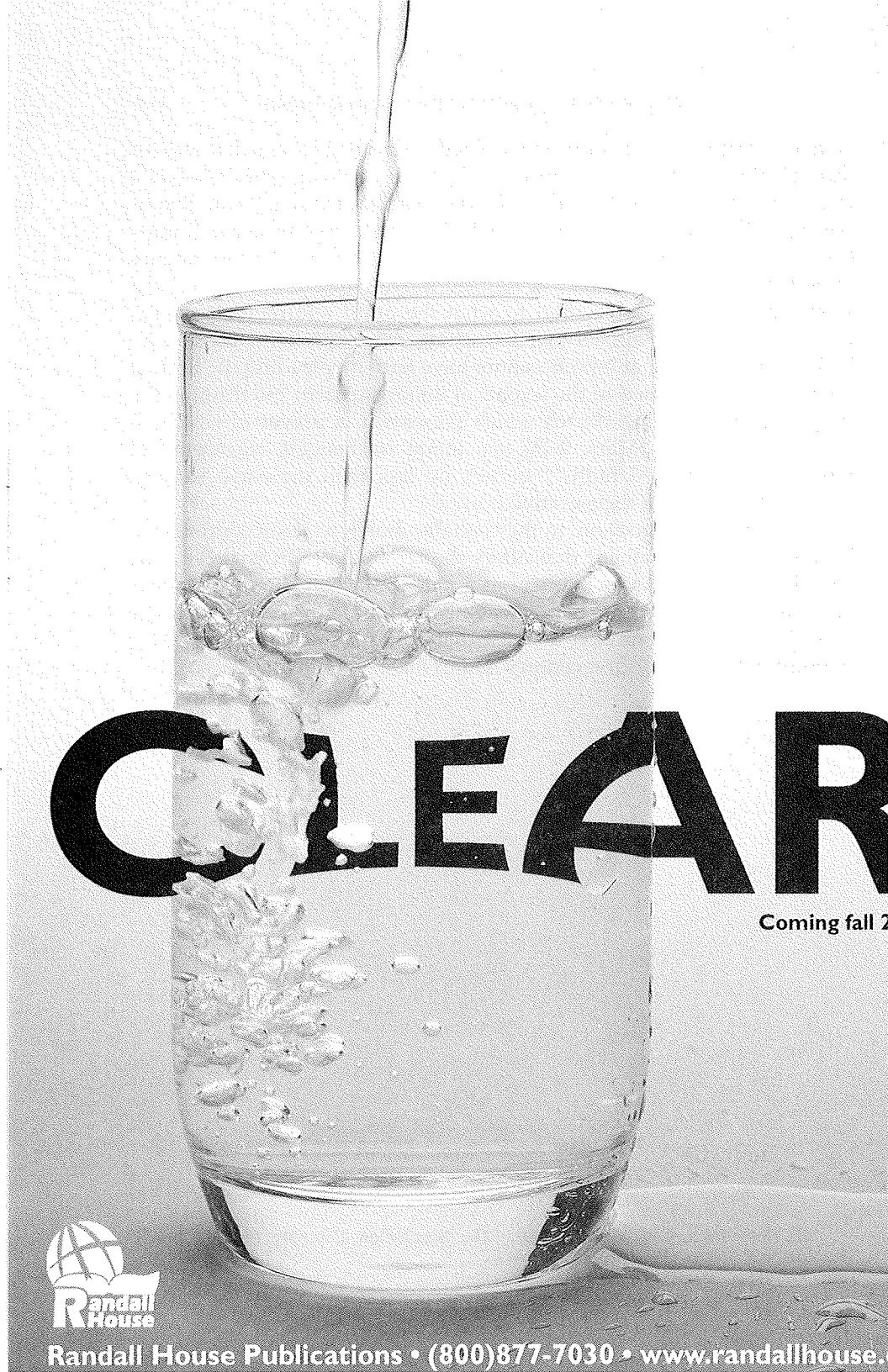
39. *Ibid.*

40. Pelagius, an Irish monk and a contemporary of Augustine, taught that there were two avenues of approach to salvation—through the cross of Christ by faith or through the keeping of the Law. He rejected the idea of Original Sin and assumed that man was inherently good and capable of good works that would lead to salvation.

symbolic, Luther was still strongly influenced by the heritage that was his through the historic church. In his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, a tract published in 1520, Luther fleshed out his evolving convictions regarding the sacraments of the church. After reducing the seven Roman Catholic sacraments to two by demanding that a sacrament give evidence of both a sign and a promise, he defined infant baptism in no uncertain terms and in direct opposition to what the other reformers—Zwingli, Calvin, and the Anabaptists—were teaching. After answering critics who had reminded him that infants cannot have faith by pleading the faith of the sponsors, he turned to the impact of infant baptism. “So through the prayer of the believing church which presents it, a prayer to which all things are possible [Mark 9:23], the infant is changed, cleansed and renewed by inpoured faith.”<sup>41</sup> Luther, no less than the early Fathers, ascribed to baptism a regenerative power.

And the debate goes on. In the Catholic church baptism continues to be viewed as a sacrament that offers the removal of Original Sin. The church of Christ requires baptism as a part of the salvation experience. And others simply require baptism at the moment faith is expressed. The early Fathers set in motion an idea that continues to shape Christian thought in the twenty-first century and in the new millennium.

41. *Three Treatises of Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church”* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 197.



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## Book Reviews

*Hard Sayings of the Bible.* By Walter C. Kaiser, Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Brauch. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996. 808 pp. \$33.00 hardcover.

Mark Twain claimed that it was not the parts of the Bible he didn't understand that bothered him, but those parts that were perfectly clear. While we may appreciate his comment, it hardly allows true students of the Word the luxury of dodging alleged discrepancies or tension-packed questions emerging from the text.

How long has it been since you were asked a difficult Bible question and you struggled for a convincing answer? Worse yet, you agonized that the person asking the question might have been even less impressed than you were with your answer? Frustration is often increased when you realize that even the very best books on your shelf tend to ignore the really tough passages.

What if you had a comprehensive, reliable, multi-author, single-volume-book that addressed approximately 450 of the Bible's truly "Hard Sayings," most difficult passages, or thorny issues you pray no one will ever ask you about? What if that same book were also equipped with an easy-find subject index and also a book, chapter, and verse index from Genesis to Revelation?

*Hard Sayings of the Bible*, published by InterVarsity Press, is an invaluable tool for serious students of the Bible who are unwilling to settle for pat answers. It is an irreplaceable supplement for anyone seeking definitive answers to many commonly asked Bible difficulties. This compilation of works, originally appearing in five volumes, has now been expanded to include over 100 new verses.

Old Testament writer and scholar Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., devotes 265 pages unraveling more than 200 hard sayings or hard questions taken from scriptural passages from Genesis through Malachi. Some of the 37 issues emerging from Genesis alone include why Eve was created from a rib, where Cain got his wife, capital punishment, polygamy, Rachel's

possession of the household gods, and a key prophecy linked to the word "Shiloh."

Answers to other prominent Old Testament questions seek to satisfy inquiring minds as to whether it was right for Rahab to lie about the spies or whether Jephthah really sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering. Did God or Pharaoh harden the monarch's heart? Conflicting genealogies and numerical accounts are attacked head-on. The book is unswerving in its aim of providing answers to *hard* sayings.

Another 431 pages are devoted to nearly 350 hard sayings of the New Testament. F. F. Bruce crafts solid responses to frequently asked questions taken from the Synoptic Gospels. Manfred Brauch confronts hard-to-answer questions found in Paul's writings, and Peter Davids's expertise extends to questions arising from across the New Testament. All four writers are capable scholars committed to the conviction that "the Bible is God's inspired Word to the church." Their combined efforts represent a comprehensive scholarly effort at solving difficulties and alleged discrepancies taken from every book in the Bible.

Hard questions relating to the Gospels include such matters as mountain-moving faith, the camel and the eye of a needle, a promise that the disciples would do "greater things than these," and a bold attempt at harmonizing the sequence of events surrounding the resurrection. Interesting examples taken from Hebrews provide explanations as to whether Jesus could really be tempted in every point like as we and illustrate how the Son of God could "learn obedience" and be made "perfect."

Of equal value are the seventy pages located in the opening section of the book containing a general introduction and twelve short essays treating fundamentally related issues. Articles include: How do we know who wrote the Bible? Can we believe in Bible miracles? Why don't Bible genealogies always match up? Do the dates of Old Testament kings fit secular history? Does archaeology support Bible history? Are Old Testament prophecies really accurate?

This book obviously does not answer every question, nor will its readers agree with all of the explanations given. If the answers were easy, then they could hardly be characterized as "Hard Sayings of the Bible," and the book would be unnecessary. But the book's solid directness, uncompromising scholarship, and consistent thoroughness make it commendable. Solutions to hard questions regarding the Bible seldom convince skeptics, but when they are based on good scholarship, answers are reaffirming to conscientious Christians.

Wendell Walley  
California Christian College  
Fresno, California

*Orthodoxy*. By G. K. Chesterton. New York: Doubleday, 1990. 160 pp. \$9.95 paperback.

Believers often cringe when they see self-appointed representatives of the Christian faith spewing hateful speech in picket lines or making inane comments to the media about current events. There are representatives, however, like Ravi Zacharias, who are characterized by dignity and intelligence. But if I had to pick a person to represent Christianity to our culture, I would select an Englishman who died in 1936: G. K. Chesterton. He was intelligent, eloquent, humane, and had a remarkable wit, in both senses of the latter word. A prolific writer, Chesterton wrote often in defense of Christianity, and his abilities as an ambassador for his faith are nowhere more evident than in his book *Orthodoxy*.

Don't be misled by the title: Chesterton's book is no systematic theology, but the story of how he came to orthodox faith—a story that involves literature, philosophy, theology, and autobiography, though readers should not expect a history of a life but a history of one man's thought. The book was prompted when he wrote a series of essays called *Heretics*, and his critics said that he could easily dismiss current philosophies but asked if he could provide an alternative. The result was a book that attempts to explain how Christianity fit the philosophical questions with which he had long struggled. He says, "I will not call it my philosophy; for I did not make it. God and humanity made it; and it made me."

Chesterton fights against a philosophy that was prevalent among intellectuals of his time (and ours): a materialism that denies the supernatural. In the midst of an intellectual climate proclaiming that "God is dead" and that humans are merely highly-evolved animals, Chesterton affirms that life has an unavoidable spiritual dimension. He turns his intellect and wit on those who would mock Christianity because of its emphasis on the supernatural and on those who would suggest that Christians are consequently limited in their ability to think freely about the world in which they live—a world, according to the materialists, composed only of natural causes and effects. Speaking of one of his opponents, Chesterton says, "Mr. McCabe thinks me a slave because I am not allowed to believe in determinism. I think Mr. McCabe a slave because he is not allowed to believe in fairies." He adds, "It is absurd to say that you are especially advancing freedom when you only use free thought to destroy free will."

Many of the ideas in *Orthodoxy* will resonate with a postmodern audience, even though the book is almost one hundred years old. The book will certainly help readers think about key issues in our culture, aided by

Chesterton's unique insights. Though pluralism was not a buzzword in Chesterton's day, he includes a chapter on "The Suicide of Thought," where he argues that if we are free to believe anything we want, then we are not really free to believe anything. As he puts it, "If, in your bold creative way, you hold yourself free to draw a giraffe with a short neck, you will really find that you are not free to draw a giraffe." He even addresses religious pluralism when he contrasts Christianity with Eastern religions in a chapter on "The Romance of Orthodoxy." He argues that one of the distinctives of Christianity is that it is the only religion where God ever turned his back on himself: "When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God." This chapter advances several arguments against those who would assimilate all religions into one.

The book's highpoint is the chapter "The Ethics of Elfland" where Chesterton imaginatively shows how the fairy tales he learned as a child mirror human existence. Through his common sense and imagination, he helps to restore a sense of wonder and joy to life that much of modernity has either forsaken or destroyed. Yet he does so not with an escapist mentality, as one might expect when arguing from fairy tales, but with a mind-set that readily admits the evil along with the good. He says one of the greatest things he learned from these stories is that life was as precious as it was puzzling. It was an ecstasy because it was an adventure; it was an adventure because it was an opportunity. The goodness of the fairy tale was not affected by the fact that there might be more dragons than princesses; it was good to be in a fairy tale.

His insistence that life holds goodness and wonder as well as suffering defies those who see everything human as so depraved as to be worthless and corrupt. He argues that it is the presence of evil that prompts us to hold on to the good when we find it. Chesterton says, "There had come into my mind a vague and vast impression that in some way all good was a remnant to be stored and held sacred out of some primordial ruin. Man had saved his good as Crusoe saved his goods: he had saved them from a wreck."

Chesterton rejects the concept of God as a stern, harsh father. Instead, he describes a God who is as full of wonder as the life he has created. He compares God to a child who can exult in monotony because he exults in beauty and his own creation. Chesterton says, "It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old,

and our Father is younger than we." He meditates on the wonder of the incarnation and speculates on why examples of Christ's sorrow and anger are recorded in the New Testament, but he is never shown laughing. He concludes that it would have been beyond our understanding: "There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth."

Chesterton's greatest accomplishment in this book is giving back the imaginative intellect to Christianity. He dismisses a boring, stifling faith that is built on security and ease in favor of one that is adventurous and alive. He says, "People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy." Or as he puts it again, "Christianity even when watered down is hot enough to boil all modern society to rags."

One of the formal features of *Orthodoxy* is that while the chapters combine to tell the story of a journey to faith, each can stand alone as an independent essay. This makes it profitable to pick up the book and begin reading anywhere. Chesterton's style, however, for all its humor and intelligence, can be a bit obtuse. According to popular legend, he never edited anything he wrote, which speaks of his genius but also makes him sometimes seem to write in circles. But his insistence that "man is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him and grief the superficial" makes any stylistic difficulties easily worth the effort.

Chesterton was in fact an ambassador for Christianity when he lived. He debated George Bernard Shaw about matters of faith in a battle of two great minds. Supposedly, Shaw would show up to the debates neatly dressed with his notes carefully in order. His opponent would shuffle in a bit disheveled with some stray thoughts he had just scribbled on the back of a napkin. Yet at the end, Chesterton would win over the audience with his intellect, imagination, and humor. He will do the same to any reader who gives *Orthodoxy* the attention it deserves.

Ben Franklin  
Free Will Baptist Bible College  
Nashville, Tennessee

*The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform.* By Roger E. Olson. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999. 652 pp. \$35.00 hardcover.

Roger Olson's work is expressly written as an introductory level historical theology. Historical theology is distinguishable as one of three major subdivisions within the general discipline of theology. Biblical theology is the treatment of doctrines along lines of testaments (Old or New), persons (such as Moses or Paul), periods (such as post-exilic or apostolic), or groups (such as minor prophets or apostles). Systematic theology seeks to render an overview of a given doctrine taken from the whole of Scripture. Historical theology is different in that it studies the development of doctrinal formulations throughout the years of Christian history. Though often underappreciated, this type of study helps one appreciate the Christian heritage that is now considered to be orthodox doctrine.

The writer's target audience is the untutored layman, student, or pastor who needs a refresher from seminary days. Tracing the narrative of church history and theological development, Olson begins with the second century apologists and their struggles against heterodoxies.

Olson is to be commended for the overall presentation of the book. Enormous challenges face anyone who would attempt to write for those who are largely unfamiliar with the landscape of both Christian history and theology. Key to his success is a writing style that flows smoothly through the details without bogging down in analysis. The writer expresses a clear vision for his target audience and does not lose readers through efforts to impress colleagues in the academy. Along the way Olson manages to provide appropriately brief summaries of major works written by key figures.

Though displaying skillful and concise explanation throughout the book, the author in several places shows particularly acute insight. Chapter 22, devoted entirely to Thomas Aquinas, is an example. Aquinas may be largely unknown to many in the book's target group, yet he heavily impacted not only the Roman Catholic church but the Protestant movement as well. Olson's decision to focus on Aquinas's teachings and impact will benefit anyone who is new to the "dumb ox" who captivated Christendom with his bellowing.

Another issue that receives strong attention from Olson is the development of the Reformed tradition. He does a superb job of detailing not only the influence of John Calvin, but also that of Ulrich Zwingli. He alludes to the fact that the Reformed tradition is usually called Calvinism when it could just as easily be called Zwinglianism. Perhaps this

overstates the case, but the point is made that the importance of Zwingli's influence is often overlooked. Interestingly, Olson notes that Free Will Baptists are occasionally referred to as Zwinglians because they share his interpretation of the Lord's Supper while at the same time rejecting his views on election and efficacious grace.

Finally, the Arminian reader will enjoy Olson's account of Arminius and the Remonstrants. The writer spends more time introducing the reader to Arminius and his thought than in most treatments. His fair and accurate account of the events at the Synod of Dort casts a proper shadow on the spoiled soil that gave rise to the now famous TULIP.

When evaluated for its genre and purpose, this book does not need major criticism. Those from a fundamentalist background may feel that Olson does not rain down a sufficient amount of brimstone on the German liberals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Likewise, Karl Barth, while not commended, does not receive the criticism that a Free Will Baptist reader may think he deserves. These disappointments, however, seem more acceptable in view of the fact that such a condemnation exceeded the author's purpose.

Perhaps the book would have been enhanced by a list for further reading that included primary as well as secondary sources. Such a list would assist those who wish to advance their study of historical theology. Whatever might be added to the book, it is an excellent introduction to this discipline.

David Outlaw  
Heads Free Will Baptist Church  
Cedar Hill, Tennessee

*BioEngagement: Making a Christian Difference through Bioethics Today.* Ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, Scott E. Daniels, and Barbara J. White. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. 265 pp. \$22.00 paperback.

This book is a volume in The Horizons in Bioethics Series, a project of The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, an international center located near Chicago, Illinois. The Center, by its own account, endeavors to bring Christian perspectives to bear on today's many pressing bioethical challenges ([www.cbhd.org](http://www.cbhd.org)).

The subtitle of the book accurately describes the volume. It is written from a solidly Christian perspective, and the intended audience is the Christian community—with the focus on clergy, health professionals, and academics.

Bioethics, the subject of the book, is considered to be the point of intersection where the dignity of the human being is constantly being opened to redefinition. The subject is not merely considered in the fashion of an intellectual exercise, but the passion of the authors and editors is to see Christians effect change in the arena of bioethics. They make a strong plea for Christians to avoid being helpless bystanders, or even victims, in this challenging realm.

The book is contemporary and cutting-edge in its reporting of current trends, its analysis of the current situation, and its offering of Christian options to effect change. The premise is offered that even today our American culture is still overshadowed by its Christian past, but it is under attack and shows signs of crumbling. Thus exists the responsibility of each Christian to engage the culture, especially at this intersecting point of bioethics.

The question is asked in many different ways throughout the book, "Can a Christian make a difference in the world?" The answer is repeatedly and consistently "yes," and the authors argue persuasively that we in fact have a biblical mandate for such cultural engagement. The twenty-first century will be the biotech century—and Christians can lead the way.

Subjects dealt with include such familiar topics as abortion and euthanasia, but the authors do not hesitate to bring up more complex matters such as welfare, sex education, evolution, disabilities, and the rationing of medical care. In reading through the book, one comes to realize that these problems, as serious as they are, merely represent symptoms of the underlying problem: our society has abandoned its Christian moral underpinnings.

R. Geoffrey Brown, in the final part of the book, reminds Christians that in order to make a difference in the arena of bioethics, we must first recognize that we are a new creation. Secondly, we must take solace and encouragement from the cross of Christ. Thirdly, we must recognize that we are members of the Christian community, and not just individuals on a solo mission. These ideas, and especially the final one, will call for some adjustment in thinking for those of us who are not accustomed to waging this war together with a broad-based alliance of Christians.

The book is divided into five parts: Christian Vision, Education and the Media, Law and Public Policy, Health Care, and The Church. While the subjects may sound dry, the essays are rich and satisfying. Part One lays a strong foundation, which then propels the reader into the subsequent sections. Part Five has a particularly strong message for the pastor.



While some might see this as primarily a reference text, one needs to skim through it at least once in order then to be able to go back and refer to it in a useful way. Many of the chapters are inspirational and motivational. With twenty different authors, there is something for the pastor, the health care professional, and any other Christian interested in these matters of literal life and death.

Paul J. Gentuso, M.D.  
Baptist Care Center at Rivergate  
Nashville, Tennessee

*Bioethics: A Christian Approach in a Pluralistic Age.* By Scott B. Rae and Paul M. Cox. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. 326 pp. \$24.00 paperback.

This book is the inaugural volume of the Critical Issues in Bioethics Series, a project of the well-known and well-respected Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity. The Center's purpose is to bring Christian perspectives to bear on current bioethical challenges. As implied by its title, this series plans to juxtapose the Christian point of view on matters of life, health, and death with that of its secular counterpart.

There has undoubtedly been a shift from a Judeo-Christian consensus—about the nature of human life, and the concept of man made in God's image—to a secular view which rejects these assumptions. The ensuing conflicts of these opposing views are myriad, and Christians must be made aware of developments in this rapidly changing arena. The lofty intent of this series is to help forestall or even prevent what C. S. Lewis warned of, a future in which "Man's final conquest has proved to be the abolition of Man." This first volume treats the field of bioethics broadly, while future volumes will focus on specific issues in detail.

The authors have divided the book into three parts: Part I (the first two chapters) presents the major systems for the bases of bioethical thought over the past twenty-five years. This includes religious perspectives of the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish faiths, along with two representative secular schools of thought. While there are some interesting things to learn here, this section is frankly somewhat laborious to read and requires some background in philosophy and general ethics to appreciate fully all of the nuances discussed. Of particular interest, however, is the Jewish point of view, which takes its thrust from the primacy of exegesis of the biblical text, as does our evangelical approach.

Part II (chapters 3-8), which makes up the bulk of the book, discusses several specific dilemmas in bioethics and presents an insightful and balanced Christian framework for dealing with these very real issues. The advent of exploding medical technology is examined in light of the belief that it is part of God's general revelation to the human race and that its use falls under the dominion mandate given in Genesis 1-2. This technology is rife with potential for abuse, however, particularly in the areas of reproduction and genetic engineering. This is explored in detail, and specific ethical concerns with various fertilization and contraceptive methods are outlined.

Other pertinent topics discussed include abortion, euthanasia, embryo and fetal research, human cloning, and end-of-life issues. An update of recent progress in each area is presented, followed by a Christian perspective with sound biblical reasoning as the basis for the opinions expressed.

It is this Part II, with its engaging discussions of bioethical quandaries, that pastors, teachers, and nonmedical laypeople will find most helpful. While its primary intended audience is those who work in health care fields, a thorough understanding of these developing issues is essential for all Christian workers.

Part III suggests ways in which Christians may engage the pluralistic culture in which health care is practiced today. The last chapter presents various scenarios that might be faced by an ethics committee at a hospital and suggests ways a Christian might impact that process. While interesting reading, this section is not germane to the needs of most pastors and teachers.

It is clear that in the years to come no congregation will be left untouched by the conflict between humanistic and Christian thought in the area of health care, and Christians need a framework in which to formulate their opinions. This book is a valuable resource for that and an excellent starting place in the study of bioethics. It can be read through initially and then used as a reference as specific questions and issues arise in the life of a pastor.

It remains to be seen if subsequent volumes in this series might be too detailed and theoretical to be of practical use to those not in health care. However, this introductory volume is recommended for all, if only for the excellent discussions in Part II. These are not issues which can be ignored or cavalierly dismissed as inherently evil or irrelevant. Christians must be able to present an informed opinion to our counterparts who do not share our theological presuppositions and certainties. This topic of biomedical ethics is one more area where we have the opportunity to be salt and light

to our world and to present to it the moral sustenance that only a transcendent God can bring.

Mark R. Paschall, M.D.  
St. John Hospital  
Detroit, Michigan

*The Free Will Baptists in History.* By William F. Davidson. Nashville: Randall House, 2001. 384 pp. \$33.95 hardback

We waited sixteen years for this book to be published, and the results are worth the wait. What started out as a revision and second edition of William Davidson's 1985 work, *The Free Will Baptists in America*, produced a more readable, more analytical, more concise, and more useful textbook than we had dared hope.

Dr. Davidson's 2001 book adds 15 years of historical analysis to close out the 20th century in a crisp, tightly written 384-page format. The 65 fewer pages than the 1985 model are not missed because of creative rewriting and inclusion of new material.

For those who want the short version of *The Free Will Baptists in History*, here's a fast tip. You can grab the heart of the book by reading the last page of each chapter where Davidson includes a precise summary that repackages the preceding pages in a few tersely worded paragraphs.

But beware. You may be tempted to read the entire chapter after sampling the author's shortcut at the end. I tried that with a few chapters and found myself enticed by the lure of newly discovered data and fresh analysis of established data.

This book has a different feel than Davidson's 1985 history. For one thing, the pace is zestier, like city driving, hustling from corner to corner. The earlier version was more of a cross-country excursion with details hidden from view by large structures on the interstate. The writer seems more sure of his conclusions, more willing to risk disagreement with traditional views of denominational history, and more eager to declare the Free Will Baptist legacy a unique experience in American Christianity.

One of the most helpful themes is Davidson's careful research into the controversial European heritage of Free Will Baptists by name, possibly as early as 1611 and certainly no later than 1659. He spares no effort to make a once-for-all direct connection between the early Free Will Baptists in North Carolina and the General Baptist roots in England, thus establishing a firm 1727 denominational origin rather than a later beginning.

Davidson carefully documents the several apparently unrelated Free Will Baptist beginnings in New England, North Carolina, and Tennessee. While there appear to have been a few doctrinal differences among the scattered organizations at first, he demonstrates that the various groups produced written materials that are strikingly similar in their final analysis and virtually identical on major points of doctrine and polity.

He acknowledges the denomination's debt to the far-reaching Randall movement. He agrees that the northern brethren made a powerful impact politically and in the heavy population centers, that they early on reached more affluent citizens and were education-focused. Then he states that it is time for us to stop bemoaning the 1911 merger losses and move on with the work at hand.

Davidson does some of his best work tracking the organization of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, showing how the 1935 beginning with northern, western, and southern Free Wills was little short of miraculous. Part of that miracle was the rugged individualism of earlier Free Will Baptists that enabled them to survive repeated Calvinistic incursions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to get up off the canvas when the movement seemed down for the count and written off by historians, and finally to set aside sectional differences at the pivotal 1935 gathering in order to do together what they could not do individually.

One of the strongest elements in the book is Davidson's willingness to revisit history as new information has become available. One of the weaknesses is that the book can not be written in a straight line from North Carolina to New England to Nashville, which makes it difficult for the nonhistorian to leap from Benjamin Randall to Paul Palmer, from General Baptist heritage to Calvinistic attacks. The Free Will Baptist story is anything but simple, as Davidson reminds us.

There are three reasons why every Free Will Baptist needs a copy of Davidson's newest history book. First, the 1985 book is out of print, so those who don't have a copy of the earlier work are unlikely to get one at this late date.

Second, the author writes more than the cold facts about Free Will Baptist history—he loves the movement, respects the people, and believes the doctrine. He has an understanding of the denomination's contribution to society and its place in history.

Third, Davidson's analysis in chapter fifteen is worth the price of the book. He does not leave the reader wandering in the mire of mergers, lost opportunities, or splintered remnants who trust no one. He pulls together the last chapter of the denomination's twentieth-century efforts

and sets them in the context of twenty-first-century possibilities. He analyzes the circumstances, admits the problems, cites the strengths, and declares his confidence in the movement for the future.

This will be the standard Free Will Baptist history text for the next twenty-five years, maybe longer. The most appealing element of the book is that Davidson freely admits his research is but an appetizer for serious historians. There is more to be learned, and Davidson tells us where to find it.

Jack Williams  
Editor, *Contact*  
Antioch, Tennessee

*Four Views on Eternal Security*, J. Matthew Pinson, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, series ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. 302 pp. \$14.99 paperback.

This book, edited by J. Matthew Pinson, is the latest volume of the "Counterpoint Series," presently made up of twelve volumes. Each gives contrasting views on theological issues, such as four views on hell, salvation, and the book of Revelation. Others give five views on subjects like sanctification, apologetics, and law and gospel, while others give three views or two views on other subjects. Anyone who desires to keep abreast of what is going on in the modern evangelical world will do well to avail himself of these volumes.

This volume is "must" reading for everyone who has any interest in an overall understanding of the major contemporary views on the security of the believer. The view of "carnal security," which is the view espoused by men like Zane Hodges and Charles Stanley who advocate a non-lordship, non-repentance form of salvation, is not presented. It would have been interesting and informative to read one of the advocates of this view and the responses of the other contributors to it.

The first view presented is Classical Calvinism, written by Michael Horton, associate professor of apologetics and historical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California. The second view, Moderate Calvinism, is written by Norman L. Geisler, president and professor of theology and apologetics at Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. The third article is on Reformed Arminianism and is written by Stephen M. Ashby, assistant professor of philosophy and religious studies at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, at the time of the writing, and now dean of the faculty at

Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College in Moore, Oklahoma. The final view, Wesleyan Arminianism, is written by J. Stephen Harper, vice-president and dean and professor of spiritual formation and Wesley studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. The editor is J. Matthew Pinson who holds an M.A.R. from Yale, an M.A. from the University of West Florida, and is completing his Ph.D. at Florida State University. He is president of Free Will Baptist Bible College in Nashville, Tennessee. Each writer was obviously selected because of his expertise on the subject.

In the introduction Pinson gives an excellent summary of the four views presented in the book. He also gives insightful and helpful background information on the differing views. Pinson, whose dissertation is on the diversity of English Arminianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reflects a broad knowledge of each of the differing views and of their historical background. The average reader will gain many helpful insights by simply reading his introduction.

Each contributor is given the opportunity to set forth his view and also to critique each of the three opposing views. This gives the reader the opportunity to gain insight on how others view and refute his view on the security of the believer. The space allowed each response is limited, yet these responses provide valuable insight. It is good to read men who can disagree as Christians, speak to the issues, and not attack their opposition personally.

Horton's treatment of Classical Calvinism is an excellent presentation of covenant theology but seems to be a weak representation of real Classical Calvinism. Stephen Harper makes the insightful observation that Horton purports to be presenting the Classical Calvinist view but never makes a single reference to Calvin. If one wants an understanding of covenant theology, he needs to read Horton's presentation which focuses on the pre-creation covenant of redemption, the so-called covenant of works and the covenant of grace. God is indeed a covenant God. He has historically related to man on the basis of a covenant. However, it is difficult to understand how Horton can build an entire theological system around a concept which his theological system either violates or implicitly denies. A covenant, in order to be a genuine relational covenant, requires the consent of two rational, feeling, volitional beings who can analyze the conditions and make an authentic decision about entering into the covenant relationship. This is exactly why God created man in his image with mind, emotions, and free will. According to Calvinism, any actual participation on the part of man in establishing the covenant relationship constitutes a denial of grace.

It is interesting that Horton chooses to refer to the covenant that God made with Adam as the covenant of works. However, Hebrews eleven is clear that God has always related to man on the basis of faith. This faith relationship between God and Adam is evident in that everything about the devil's approach to Eve was designed explicitly to discredit the character of God and to bring into question his loving and holy nature, thereby destroying their faith in him. This means that Adam was able to violate his righteous nature and move from belief to unbelief. Though they had to be provoked from the outside, once provoked, they had the ability to make an authentic choice about continued faith in God, which would be evidenced by either eating or not eating the forbidden fruit. The Tree in the midst of the Garden provided Adam with a choice. Otherwise there could be no such thing as a free will. Since the Fall, the situation is reversed. People cannot make a choice about trusting in God until they are first provoked from the outside by the Holy Spirit. But, once provoked, man has the freedom to choose to accept God's gracious offer of salvation. Ashby's theological model gives far more credibility to man made in the image of God with mind, emotions, and will, who is capable of making a genuine choice about entering into and continuing a covenant relationship with his God.

Ashby's scholarly presentation of Reformed Arminianism is excellent. At first I was apprehensive about his use of the term "Reformed Arminianism" to describe his position. However, it was soon obvious that Ashby had done his homework. He does an excellent job of justifying his use of the term by establishing the Reformed roots and theology of Arminius. Ashby reflects a breadth and a depth of knowledge on Arminius himself and on Arminianism in general. He quotes Arminius often. One of the most important observations he makes is the distinction between Reformed Arminianism and Classical Arminianism. Most Arminians are aware of many of the distinctions between themselves and the various Calvinistic views on security, but few are aware of the distinctions between Arminians themselves, especially on their views on the atonement. Ashby is very helpful in this area.

His comparison of the similarities between Reformed theology and Reformed Arminianism is also very informative, especially their similar views on the atonement and the imputed righteousness of Christ. However, he may give away a little too much on the doctrine of total depravity. It is possible to believe in the total inability of fallen man without totally destroying man's will. The fallen will of man today parallels the unfallen will of Adam before the Fall. Just as unfallen man could not move from faith to unbelief until provoked from the outside, so now

fallen man cannot move from unbelief to faith until provoked from the outside by the Holy Spirit. But, once provoked, depraved man has the ability to make the choice of saving faith.

All Arminians, especially Free Will Baptists, need to read this article. It is one of the most scholarly presentations of what has become the most widely held view on security among Free Will Baptists.

Geisler's presentation sets forth what is called Moderate Calvinism. He is at best a four-point Arminian, and the one point of Calvinism he accepts is fundamentally different from true Calvinism. This explains why Horton calls Geisler a no-point Calvinist. In any other realm, an individual who only held to one point of a five-point system and then seriously altered that point would not be considered qualified to take the name of that system. However, because Calvinism has so stigmatized Arminians, those who only hold to a distorted view of Calvin's fifth point will not admit that in reality they are over four-fifths Arminian. Although Geisler does not do this, some one-point Calvinists go so far as to label those who believe in all five of Calvin's points as "hyper-Calvinists," which is very misleading. An individual who holds to all five points of Calvinism's TULIP is nothing more than a genuine Calvinist.

Harper's presentation of the Wesleyan Arminian View seems to be more a defense of Wesley and Wesleyan Arminianism than a positive presentation of that system. Still, one cannot read his presentation without coming away with a good understanding of what distinguishes Wesleyan Arminianism from the other theological models. One of the critical differences between Wesleyan Arminianism and the other three views on the security of the believer is its view on the atonement. Although Harper seeks to present Wesley's views on the atonement as being more compatible with Reformed theology, Ashby does an excellent job in demonstrating that they are very different. Most of those who reviewed Harper note that although he used the term "imputation," he emptied it of its meaning. Wesley also believed that apostasy was not final and that the apostate could be restored, a position contrary to the Free Will Baptist view.

This book provides either the layman or the pastor with a good overall view and helpful insights into the major views on an issue over which the Church has debated for centuries. One major accomplishment of Pinson is that, as editor of the book, he was able to get before the church world the predominant view of Free Will Baptists on the security of the believer. This Reformed Arminian view is not widely known and



understood. Where many tend to lump all Arminians together, this book helps to distinguish between Wesleyan and Reformed Arminianism.

A. B. Brown  
Cramerton Free Will Baptist Church  
Cramerton, North Carolina

*Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism.* By Robert E. Picirilli. Nashville: Randall House Publications, 2002. 245 pp. \$19.95 paperback.

In *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, Robert E. Picirilli presents a definitive exposition of "Reformation Arminianism," a theological, biblical viewpoint that draws closer to the views of Jacobus Arminius (1559-1609) than those of other Arminian movements. The choice of the term "Reformation Arminianism" is meant to reflect a theological position that closely mirrors "the view of Arminius himself and his original defenders." That the author has examined Arminius's theological position is reflected in over 140 direct quotes from his writings. The use of these quotes is not the basis of Reformation Arminianism, but rather their purpose is to demonstrate that Arminius himself based his views of God's salvation on a biblical exposition of the various important texts.

Reformation Arminianism defends the belief in the total depravity of mankind, the sovereign control of God to accomplish his will, his perfect foreknowledge of the certainty of all future events and moral choices of human beings, the penal satisfaction view of the atonement, and salvation by grace through faith from beginning to end. Reformation Arminianism follows the biblical position of the Remonstrants (defenders of Arminius's position after his death) concerning apostasy, that is, that once committed, it cannot be remedied.

The author proposes (1) to "contribute to the contemporary renewal of discussion about the issues that have divided Calvinism and Arminianism," (2) to urge the acceptance of a form of Arminianism that is largely unknown to many who view Arminianism only as Wesleyanism, and (3) to present a clear view of Arminianism that is not the neo-Arminianism that is being pressed forward by the current movement of some Arminians known as "open theism."

This work begins by setting forth the historical scene in which the various differences concerning the doctrine of salvation developed between Calvinism and Arminianism. The term "Reformation

Arminianism" is intended to reflect the belief that the theological position of Arminius was developed in the context of the Reformation itself and that it maintains the insistence of this revival of truth concerning salvation in its call for *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *solo Christo*. Arminius presented his beliefs from within the Dutch Reformed Church. The term also is to serve to reflect the difference between the author's theological position and that of different forms of Arminianism that have developed since the time of the Reformation.

The author is not claiming to have rediscovered the original position of Arminius, for his views have appeared before in the history of the church since the Reformation. The views of Balthazar Hubmaier (Anabaptist), John Wesley, and the early English General Baptist Thomas Grantham had much in common with the positions put forth by Arminius.

*Grace, Faith, Free Will* focuses on the four important aspects of the doctrine of salvation: (1) the plan of salvation (i.e., predestination), (2) the provision of salvation (i.e., atonement), (3) the application of salvation, and (4) perseverance in salvation. An exposition of each of these four areas is developed with a systematic theological examination of the Calvinist view (an examination that strives to present this view as correctly as any Calvinist would), then a systematic theological presentation of the Reformation Arminian view, and thirdly (in each case) with a biblical-theological investigation of the biblical data and its reflection on each of the two views.

Predestination is the usual term employed in discussions concerning God's plan of salvation. The Calvinist insists that the concept of God's sovereign decrees marks the path that salvation's plan must follow without taking into account any free will choice of human beings. In Calvinism, salvation is unconditional, that is, while it is by faith, God has decreed who will be saved, and these will be saved because they are the elect.

Arminianism accepts many of the same tenets of Calvinism concerning the depravity of man and of the totally gracious aspect of salvation. It differs from Calvinistic thinking concerning the manner in which God has sovereignly chosen to deal with man as a free being (a limited free will). Arminians insist that there are true contingencies, that some things can go one way or another. From eternity God foreknows all these contingencies but has not sovereignly decreed the salvation of some and the reprobation of others (that is, as necessary acts decreed by him).

Reformation Arminianism sees election to salvation centered in Christ. He is the foundation of the Church and salvation is by him. The

Gospel is about him, not about election. Election is individual, it is eternal, and it is conditional (by faith). It is noted that it was not God's foreknowledge of future expressed faith that was the basis for the believer's election.

Part Two of the book also contains an important *excursus* on God's foreknowledge, man's free will, and the future. It is an overview of the Calvinist and Arminian viewpoints as compared with the open theistic (presentism) teaching that God cannot know the future moral choices of individuals. The author clearly presents the position that future events can be contingent (contra Calvinism) and certain (contra presentism) at the same time. "The future, however certain, is not closed until it occurs" (p. 62).

Concerning the New Testament doctrine of predestination, the author deals extensively with Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 9-11; and Romans 8:28-30 (as well as various other important passages). The author draws these conclusions concerning predestination (election) from his study of these passages: (1) election is from eternity; (2) election is "in Christ"; (3) election is "of believers"; (4) election is according to foreknowledge (prescience, foresight, foreplanning); (5) the foreordained elect receive the blessings of salvation; and (6) election is according to God's sovereign will.

Part Three deals with the provision of salvation. It focuses on the extent of the atonement. The Calvinist sees Christ's death and righteousness being provided only for the elect (limited atonement), while the Arminian affirms that the atonement of the Lord is provisionally available for the entire race of human beings (unlimited atonement).

Differing from many Arminians, Reformation Arminians (as well as Arminius) view the nature of Christ's atonement as that of *satisfaction*. Some Arminians propose a *governmental* view. Reformation Arminianism and Calvinists do not basically differ concerning the nature of the atonement (satisfaction). Their differences arise concerning the extent of the provision of Christ.

Calvinism's developed teaching on the extent of the atonement is simply a continuation of its teaching of unconditional election. Because the Lord sovereignly chose to save the elect, the death and righteousness of Christ are only provided for them. There is some discussion and disagreement among Calvinists themselves as to whether Christ's death was offered for all (the argument does not have to do with the sufficiency of his death for all). However, their basic tenet is that for those elected unconditionally, God sent Christ to die and to effect their salvation (limited atonement).

Reformation Arminianism asserts that since election is conditional, it logically follows that Christ's atonement is unlimited in its offer. The Bible speaks of the will or desire of God to have all men saved, a statement that would seem to be self-contradictory if God has not provided a means for all men to be saved. When the Bible speaks of Jesus as the propitiation for the sins of believers, it also states that he is the propitiation for the sins of all the world. In particular this statement in 1 John 2:2 is examined by the author as one of the most important passages of the New Testament that teaches universal (unlimited) atonement.

The author sees the administration of salvation as perhaps the most significant part of the Calvinism vs. Arminianism discussion. Is salvation applied unconditionally (Calvinism) or conditionally (Arminianism)? Part Four focuses on the differences in the views concerning the depravity of man and the decreed order of salvation. Two important terms in this section have to do with the Calvinist's use of *regeneration* and the author's term, *pre-regenerating grace*.

The Calvinist views regeneration as that sovereign act of God in which the Holy Spirit regenerates the depraved (but elected) sinner to the point where he/she can exercise faith in Christ. The author uses the term *pre-regenerating grace* to refer to what Arminius called *prevenient grace* (i.e., that grace that goes before or precedes). The Reformation Arminian agrees with his Calvinist brother that fallen man is completely unable to respond on his own to the gospel (John 6:44). The difference between the Calvinist's use of *regeneration* and the Reformation Arminian term *pre-regeneration* is seen in the view of man and of God's administration of his salvation. The Calvinist asserts that the decreed election of a totally depraved person means that when the Holy Spirit regenerates the person, then he can exercise faith in Christ. Faith is a gift from God. The person regenerated will then exercise faith and, according to Calvinism, will be converted, not against his will, but willingly. On the other hand, *pre-regenerating grace* enables (draws) the depraved sinner to exercise faith in Christ.

In Calvinism, with its salvific basis in God's eternal decrees and election, salvation is *to* faith, rather than *by* faith. That is, regeneration enables the elected sinner *to* be able to believe through the gift of faith that is given by God. Arminianism asserts that salvation is *by* faith, the faith of the believer who has been enabled by the Holy Spirit to believe.

Calvinists often accuse Arminianism of presenting a view of salvation in which faith becomes a work of the believer's free will. The author establishes that the New Testament teaches exclusively that faith is not a

work of merit. There is no room in Reformation Arminianism for any faith *by works*, rather it is all *by grace through faith*.

As concerning the doctrine of the believer's perseverance in salvation, the author points out that historically Arminius and his followers were cautious as to whether a true believer could arrive at the point of apostasy. However, the ensuing years quickly marked a clear difference between these two Christian camps, with the Calvinists affirming that those who were elected in eternity for salvation could never be cast away from God. The Reformation Arminian position is that one who has placed saving faith in Christ but then ceases to have said faith will be rejected as a son by God himself.

In Calvinism, the perseverance of the believer is necessary. True Calvinism teaches that the believer will persevere through justification and in sanctification. By the gift of faith, which has been given to the elected sinner by God, he is placed in union with Christ. It is said that such a union cannot ever be broken. The Reformation Arminian asserts that the believer's union with Christ, based on the condition of faith, can be broken if the condition ceases to exist. Because the Calvinist asserts that the union is based in the election of God, it cannot cease to exist. Again one sees that this vital point in the discussion hinges on the question of the application of salvation (*to* faith versus *by* faith).

Reformation Arminianism affirms the conditional perseverance of the believer. The New Testament warnings (especially those of the author of Hebrews and Peter himself) speak to the real possibility of apostasy. The same New Testament also affirms the power of God to keep the one who is believing in Christ. The author also briefly treats the "sub-Calvinist" argument (the view of many Baptist groups) for "eternal security."

In an *Afterword* the author, while affirming much that Reformation Arminianism shares with Calvinism, states the conclusion that "the traditional Calvinist position is that salvation is not by faith. . . . When the Calvinist looks back into eternity to explore God's plan, he sees salvation by election without regard to any decision by man" (p. 235).

The conclusion of Reformation Arminianism is that salvation is by faith. Salvation is entirely by grace. Man is a totally depraved sinner, but God created him as a moral agent, with a limited free will. The sinner, listening to and believing the gospel, is enabled by the Holy Spirit's pre-regenerating grace to exercise the faith that God requires for salvation. All of the blessings of salvation are by faith (not works) and are entirely gracious. The believer is saved by faith and is kept (guarded) by faith.

*Grace, Faith, Free Will* should be read by both Calvinists and Arminians. It provides a more correct understanding of each position and should serve to promote more intelligent and irenic discussions between these two groups of believers. Commonality of belief will serve to temper attacks against "straw man" arguments from both points of view.

Ronald J. Callaway  
 Missionary  
 Free Will Baptist Foreign Missions  
 Cuba and Panama

*The Quest for Truth: Answering Life's Inescapable Questions.* By F. Leroy Forlines. Nashville: Randall House Publication, 2001. 572 pp. \$34.95 hardback.

F. Leroy Forlines is Professor Emeritus of Theology at Free Will Baptist Bible College, Nashville, Tennessee. His other book titles include: *Biblical Ethics, Biblical Systematics* (also available in Russian and Spanish), and the *Randall House Bible Commentary on Romans*.

Professor Forlines has produced a valuable and eminently readable theological treatise, which begins to fill a long-standing gap in the overall body of evangelical writings on systematic theology. While Evangelicalism has produced an impressive array of scholarship over the last sixty years, the systematic theologies have been almost exclusively Calvinistic in their approach. The exceptions have had a decidedly Wesleyan orientation. Hence, the Classical Arminianism that Forlines propounds provides a much-needed construct for those dissatisfied with both of these approaches. In the words of University of Aberdeen New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall, *The Quest for Truth* is "probably . . . the major contemporary exposition of Classical Arminianism."

Everyone who reads Forlines's work seems to be struck by the fact that he is not merely writing as a theologian for other theologians. Instead, he takes deep theological truths and filters them through what he calls a "total personality approach." In so doing, he is constantly relating theological truths to every aspect of our being as God's image-bearers in the world. We are not merely "thinking things," as René Descartes asserted in his *Discourse on Method*. We are also *feeling* and *acting* beings. Therefore, when the truths of God are presented, they cannot be approached as merely epistemological concerns. They must also relate to one's emotions (the affective domain) and to one's actions (the volitional

realm), i.e., to the very essence of what it means to be a person. So, ontology plays as much a role in gaining theological understanding as does epistemology, the reason being that theology is for life.

In his commitment to this "total personality approach," Forlines develops his theology in two directions—first, with the person in mind, and second, with the current *zeitgeist* in view. He goes to great lengths to show that there has been a significant cultural shift (borrowing Thomas Kuhn's term, *paradigm shift*) from Modernism to Postmodernism. Forlines seeks to expose many of the dangers of Postmodernism, e.g., epistemological relativism, ethical nihilism, and the rejection of overarching systems of belief. In order to communicate with those of the twenty-first century who have themselves been impacted by this postmodern mood, Forlines writes in something of a postmodern form. He often writes in the first person. He calls upon his own personal experiences to illustrate and validate his argument. He appeals to the personal experiences of his readers, whether intellectual, emotional, empirical, or volitional, in order to drive home truths. He reminisces about many scholars he has known. He alludes to the example of his parents as he was growing up during the Great Depression, and he recalls a societal commitment to ideals that was once nearly pervasive but is now long gone. By using this sort of methodology, rather than remaining strictly in the realm of philosophico-apologetico-theologico-terminology, Professor Forlines has exhibited something of the truth of Marshall McLuhan's suggestion that "the medium is the message."

Though he relates theology to the grave concerns he has about Postmodernism throughout the book, he does not merely give us a jeremiad. His eighteenth chapter seeks to set forth positive suggestions for "Communicating the Christian Message in a Postmodern Culture." He is not content merely to curse the darkness. Rather, he encourages each of us toward a thoughtful and critical understanding of the development of the "paradigm shift" from Modernism to Postmodernism. Several of his suggestions seem particularly apropos. He suggests that:

(1) We should place strong emphasis upon *the inescapable questions of life*. These include questions such as: Is there a God? What about right and wrong? What about life after death? Is there meaning and purpose in life? The reason this approach may be particularly useful with postmoderns is because those of a postmodern psyche are more given to the internal validation of truth than were modernists. Modernism sought objective and universal truth-claims (often termed "metanarratives"). If postmodernists lean more toward their subjectivity

for validating their notions of "truth," then why not appeal to them in the realm of their subjective experience which they cannot escape?

(2) We should place increased emphasis upon general revelation. This would appeal to one's innate ability to sense God in the created order. Certainly Paul makes clear in Romans 1-2 that much can be rightly known about God from the creation.

(3) We should appeal to the moral order in the world. For instance we might look at the widespread reaction of people toward the sexual scandals of top politicians. We could note a general societal sense of just deserts over the indulgent perquisites of greedy and fraudulent CEOs. We may cite the communal outrage expressed against the injustice of commercial airliners being flown into skyscrapers. This is a powerful means of appealing to people about a natural law or moral order. Noting such occurrences and pointing out the common response may lead to profitable discussions of matters like divine command, conscience, guilt, and judgment.

There are many things that could have been highlighted in reviewing this fine work. Forlines does an excellent job of arguing that God's primary means of dealing with his human creation is in terms of "influence/response" rather than "cause/effect," as is held by most Calvinists. Further, he devotes three chapters to his consideration of the thorny issues related to election. He presents a depth and a breadth in his study of election that is rarely seen in theologians of any stripe. I might have wished that Forlines would have addressed issues that he has left for another time, particularly ecclesiology and eschatology. Nevertheless, I wish to give this work my resounding recommendation. And I would join him in what sounds to me like the call of a prophet: that we each commit ourselves never to be satisfied with an abridged or truncated view of Christianity.

Stephen M. Ashby  
Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College  
Moore, Oklahoma

*Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader.* Ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne. Third Edition. Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1999. 782 pp. \$29.99 paperback.

This is not a book to be read through at one sitting, or even a half-dozen. It is a challenging compilation of articles and studies from 105 men and



women who have been actively involved in world outreach over the centuries. Neither is it a book written from one narrow perspective to persuade the reader to adopt a specific "movement" in mission strategy and involvement. The book includes articles from a broad spectrum of missiological thought and currents. It is a book that should be included in the library of every pastor, teacher, and lay leader. But it must not be left to collect dust on the shelf. This book is a practical, thought-provoking, educational, and inspirational volume that will expand the understanding, appreciation, and involvement of every believer in God's goal of reaching every people in the world with the message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

*Perspectives* approaches God's global mission of extending salvation to all the world from four perspectives: biblical, historical, cultural, and strategic. Each section contains excellent articles and should be studied prayerfully and with an open heart. Some articles may raise as many questions as answers, but almost all are worthy of serious consideration.

The first section of the book, the biblical perspective, begins with an article by John R. W. Stott which emphasizes that God has always been a missionary God and that the Bible is a missionary book from beginning to end. This section builds on the presentation of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, not only to bless him personally, but to make him a blessing to all the nations through his seed, accomplished in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God's Son. It progresses to a final article on the hope of a world revival during the end times and the return of Christ in glory. Various articles in this section emphasize the missionary mandate of Israel, the spiritual battle raging between God and Satan for the souls of men, God's desire that all peoples worship and glorify him as the basis of the missionary mandate, and the importance of the church, prayer, and a willingness to suffer in the accomplishment of the missionary task.

Much space is given to the evangelism of the Gentile nations both by Old Testament saints and prophets and by Jesus and New Testament believers. The continuing privilege of Christians today to share in this great missionary mandate is also noted. The three short articles centering on prayer present it as (1) "rebellion against the world in its fallenness, the absolute and undying refusal to accept as normal what is pervasively abnormal"; (2) a strategic means of moving the world toward God; and (3) an evangelistic tool that, as we pray for the felt needs of the world, draws them to their greatest need, relationship with God. This first section also includes several articles that argue powerfully for the absolute necessity of the knowledge of Christ for salvation.

The historical section begins with an article by Ralph Winter entitled "The Kingdom Strikes Back." In it he relates the work of God in reclaiming his kingdom from Satan after the Fall. He ends the article with a wake-up call to Christians in the Western world who are seeing their predominant place in the evangelization of the world increasingly challenged by Christians in the non-Western world.

Other articles in this section include a very encouraging one by Patrick Johnstone relating the phenomenal growth of Christianity in the past two centuries, articles on the relationship of local churches and missionary societies, the development of missionary strategy and outreach, the importance of women and student movements in the advance of missions, and a short article highlighting the contribution of African-Americans in missionary outreach. This section also includes excerpts from important historical addresses such as William Carey's pamphlet countering the view of many nineteenth-century Christians that the great commission was no longer valid, the appeal of J. Hudson Taylor for Christians to evangelize China, and the challenge of John R. Mott for university students to commit their lives to world evangelization in the early twentieth century.

The historical section concludes with significant articles by recent missiologists. These include an appeal by Donald McGavran for missionaries to reach people in their cultures instead of isolating individual converts from their cultures, and Ralph Winter's address to the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne encouraging Christians to seek out unreached people groups within countries rather than just being satisfied with the goal of making some converts in every country. The last two articles of this section deal with the changing demographics and complexion of the Christian world today and a suggestion about how to react to new, nontraditional, and even errant forms of Christianity which are developing in some countries.

The third and shortest section, the cultural perspective, may be the most helpful one for pastors and lay Christians who would like to understand better the problems and difficulties encountered in working with people of a different culture. Through a number of short articles and several graphic presentations, the reader is given helpful insight into such subjects as the role of culture and contextualization in communicating the gospel. Articles on missionary bonding and identification deal with how the missionary relates personally to the people with whom he works. Other articles emphasize the importance of storytelling and redemptive analogies in effectively communicating the gospel message.

Two articles especially highlight the significance of spiritual warfare in mission outreach. Discussing the controversial issue of "power encounter," Charles Kraft encourages a balancing of the emphasis on experiential power encounters between Satan and God with a comparable emphasis on truth and allegiance encounters, e.g., the truth of God and a full, complete allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Paul Hiebert has written an interesting article in which he challenges Western missionaries, who sometimes ignore the spiritual beliefs of Third World peoples, to be more aware of the reality and importance of what he calls "supernatural this-worldly beings and forces" in these cultures.

Other topics include the problem of defining and understanding the nature of sin in other cultures, the need to reevaluate what constitutes an indigenous church, and a response to the premise espoused by secular sociologists and anthropologists that missionaries wrongfully destroy cultures. This third section concludes with a lengthy article, "The Willowbank Report," compiled from papers and discussions at a consultation on "Gospel and Culture" sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization in January 1978. This important article gives a concise, clear presentation of the conclusions of the thirty-three representatives of the worldwide Christian community present at this consultation concerning the status and direction of the Christian missionary enterprise in our modern world.

The final and most extensive section, the strategic perspective, is divided into six subsections: strategy for world evangelization, strategies for development, strategies for church-planting, case studies of pioneer church-planting, world Christian discipleship, and world Christian partnership. The main emphases in the "Strategy for World Evangelization" subsection are on the identification of and need to reach unreached people groups and on the tremendous need and challenge of evangelizing the world's megacities. The "Strategies for Development" subsection focuses on the social needs of the world and how to integrate a concern and involvement in this area with the supreme missionary task of evangelism. The articles on church planting cover such areas as avoiding developing dependent churches which cannot function without the missionary and his resources, leading converts and new church groups to mother new churches, and specific guidelines for planting churches among animistic, Hindu, Chinese, and Muslim people groups. Several articles discuss the special problems and concerns involved in reaching Muslim groups. A number of short, interesting articles give case studies of how churches were formed in very specific situations.

The final two subsections develop the concept of being a world Christian: a believer in a local church whose goal is to be involved to the utmost of his ability in God's plan to reach the whole world for Christ. Subjects include the role of the local church in missions, the need to embrace a wartime lifestyle to accomplish the mission task, the importance of senders, steps to becoming a "goer," the potential of "tentmaker" ministries, and a challenge to reach the people of the world who are right in one's own community. The final challenge of the book is to develop partnerships—partnerships between missionaries and home churches, missionaries and mission churches, missionaries and other mission agencies—for the greater glory of God and a more effective advancement of God's kingdom throughout our world.

Tackling the entire book may be simply overwhelming for some readers. A glance over the contents pages, however, will surely whet the appetite of any Christian who is hungry to know more about how God is working in our world and the possibilities of being a part of his "great commission" team to reach that world. There is a wealth of information and inspiration to be found between its covers. The time given to studying and meditating on the implications of this book will be time well spent.

Patsy Vanhook  
Missionary  
Free Will Baptist Foreign Missions  
Nantes, France

*Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions.* By John Piper. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993. 240 pp. \$14.99 paperback.

In the Afterword of this popular tome, Tom Steller, the book's dedicatee and John Piper's ministerial associate, explains that the book's purpose is actually two-fold. It intends not only to inform the student of the supremacy of God in missions but also to invite laymen and students alike to become involved more personally in the cause of missions. This pastor-theologian (Doctor of Theology, University of Munich) accomplishes both tasks admirably.

It is also very clear that the author desires to shore up the theological foundation of popular missiology. He is, no doubt, one of many who has noticed a decided shift in the focus of current missions literature toward the "anthropological, methodological and technological" sciences (p. 8).

He proposes, therefore, the forgotten or overlooked cornerstone of God's supremacy by correctly offering a theological counterbalance to the study of missions. "Missions exists," he says simply, "because worship doesn't" (p. 11). The remainder of the text builds on the thesis that it is God's glory that not only fuels missions but is also the goal of missions.

Piper divides his argument into two sections. The first reveals the purpose, power, and price of missions in which he develops the themes of worship, prayer, and suffering. These three chapters could very well stand alone as essays or sermons and, as such, are powerfully written. The author masterfully uses each theme to link inextricably missions and the glory of God. The final section deals with the necessity and nature of missions. These chapters are more didactic in style but no less powerful. In the first the exclusive claims of explicit faith in Christ are defended. The second gives biblical support to the popular notion of visualizing the missionary mandate as a call to "people groups" rather than to individuals in general or to nations as geopolitical units.

The author admits that certain truths relating to his thesis will be difficult for the believer to assimilate, for example, "God takes delight in being God" and, "man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." The difficulty lies in man's finite perspective and ingrained belief that egocentrism is unhealthy and unspiritual. Piper, however, answers these doubts well (p. 23).

Some readers may be uncomfortable with the author's staunch Calvinist position concerning election (p. 52) and his unswerving loyalty to the Puritans (p. 49ff). He holds up the Puritans as examples of great missionary passion; it is more likely, however, that the Calvinist position they held hindered them from being such. He contends that the 15,000 people who left England for the New World between 1627 and 1640 "saw their emigration . . . as part of God's missionary strategy to extend His kingdom among nations" (p. 49). It is more likely that the Puritans' missionary passion to take the gospel to unreached peoples was certainly not primary in their relocation and perhaps not even secondary. Piper could have better illustrated the sovereignty of God and the power of prayer by referring to the eighteenth-century Moravians or the concerts of prayer encouraged in the correspondence of Jonathan Edwards and John Sutcliff. The prayers that fueled the missionary passion of an entire community and birthed the first sending agency and its first missionary (William Carey) are far more vivid examples of intercessory confidence in the Almighty's ability to "save the heathen" than the prayers of the Puritans.

These criticisms aside, Piper has added an excellent volume to advance missions education and passion in today's church. His masterful defense of the exclusivist position of salvation (along with excellent footnotes) is worth the price of the book alone. If quotes from this text in the writings and sermons of today's missions advocates is any indication, then it is becoming one of the theological references of the modern missions movement. Along with the works of Robertson McQuilken and David Hesselgrave, it provides a necessary counterbalance to missions texts that unwittingly glorify man rather than God by heeding an anthropological before a theological agenda.

Tom McCollough  
Central Free Will Baptist Church  
Royal Oak, Michigan

*The Reformed Pastor.* By Richard Baxter. Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2001. 160 pp. \$18.95 paperback.

Do not let the word "reformed" confuse you. By "reformed" Richard Baxter meant a "revitalized pastor, renewed in heart and spirit to serve God fully." Baxter lived in a time when the spiritual condition of the church was deplorably corrupt. He minced no words in warning ministers of their spiritual lethargy. This Puritan, who lived seventy-six years in the mid-sixteen hundreds, writes as if he were preaching today. His three-hundred-fifty-year-old messages are just as appropriate today as they were in 1650.

Baxter lived during a critical (and corrupt) period of England's history. An Episcopalian by ordination, he and some eighteen hundred dissenters separated from the established church. Consequently, he was expelled from the church he had pastored fourteen years. He retired to London to preach but suffered nearly two years' imprisonment at the age of seventy. He died five years later, leaving behind some 135 unpublished items. Baxter was "wordy" to the extent that editors have abridged this work considerably (this edition was reduced to 151 pages from 580 pages).

*The Reformed Pastor* could easily reform the conscientious pastor and transform his ministry. The classic work over and over again turns to the pastor, reminding the man of God of his responsibilities to the Lord. Baxter leaves no stones unturned. He condemns lazy preachers and undisciplined pastors, even suggesting that many of them are probably

unconverted. One must keep reminding oneself that Baxter lived over 350 years ago and not today. His words can sting the conscience of contemporary pastors.

Baxter majored on the family. He taught his congregation Bible doctrines individually, family by family, through personal counseling. With two assistants, he taught about eight hundred families each year. The teaching was conducted on Mondays and Tuesdays from morning to nightfall. He began this book with a challenge to instruct every church member personally and systematically. He concluded the book with a wealth of material on how to teach a catechism in homes.

A young pastor may well find it beneficial to establish his ministry on the one-on-one approach Baxter promoted. Even though the age in which he lived was plagued with much wickedness, still he was not faced as we are today with homes where both parents work, the television set is the center of attention, and sports are worshiped. It would be interesting to see the spiritual results today if his beliefs and practices were enacted in the congregation.

Baxter laid heavy emphasis on unity among pastors. That position was sometimes contrary to the Puritan separatistic, narrow exclusiveness. His direction in this matter would need to be evaluated carefully by the Fundamentalist of this day.

Every preacher would benefit greatly by picking up this book every year or two to be reminded of the high standards Baxter calls us to as we study, pray, preach, and win sinners to Christ. These pages will truly "reform" the honest, concerned, God-called preacher.

Dennis Wiggs  
Ruth's Chapel Free Will Baptist Church  
New Bern, North Carolina

*Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices.* By Thomas Brooks. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1984. 253 pp. \$7.50 paperback.

In his *A Quest for Godliness* J. I. Packer compared the Puritans to the giant Redwoods of Northern California. Indeed, Puritan literature stands as a striking landmark, aged and towering. Yet, unfortunately, many modern believers are ignorant of these writings in spite of their stature. Bible-believing ministers should take the lead in correcting this blatant oversight. Works such as William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy*

*Life*, Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor*, and Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* should be the regular diet of God's people.

A great introduction to this gold mine of true spirituality is Thomas Brooks's *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*. Brooks (1608-1680) studied at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, perhaps rubbing shoulders with John Milton, Thomas Shepard, John Cotton, and Thomas Hooker, the last three of New England fame. For many years he pastored in London, preaching the gospel during days of great political and social tumult, including plagues, fires, and civil war. His works run to six volumes. *Precious Remedies* was first published in 1652.

Based on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 2:11, *Precious Remedies* throughout follows a pattern of stating a stratagem of the devil and then listing truths or steps for overcoming the temptation. For example, in the first division, which deals with "devices to draw the soul to sin," Brooks explains how Satan aims "to present God to the soul as one made up of all mercy" (p. 50). "You need not be fearful of sin," the devil says, "for God is a God of mercy." Five remedies to this trick are examined, one explaining that "God is as just as he is merciful," another warning that "sins against mercy will bring the greatest and sorest judgments upon men's heads and hearts" (p. 51).

Other devilish strategies explained and remedied include that of "presenting to the soul the crosses, losses, reproaches, sorrows, and sufferings that do daily attend those that walk in the ways of holiness" (p. 79); and that of "working them [the saints] to be frequent in comparing themselves and their ways with those that are reputed or reported to be worse than themselves" (p. 89). Of the seven offered remedies to this last-mentioned device, number one is "to consider this, That there is not a greater nor a clearer argument to prove a man a hypocrite, than to be quick-sighted abroad and blind at home." Repeatedly, Brooks carefully diagnoses subtle tricks from hell and then lays out practical and heavenly cures.

Another main section reminds the reader of eight devices designed to "keep souls from holy duties, to hinder souls in holy services, to keep them off from religious performances" (pp. 102-41). This is followed by another eight devices, these designed "to keep saints in a sad, doubting, questioning and uncomfortable condition" (pp. 142-82). The remedies suggested in every section are brief and to the point, usually about a page in length.

The book concludes with a number of miscellaneous devices and accompanying remedies, some aimed at people fitting certain descriptions, such as those who are learned or the poor. Included here are helps



for sinners who are often confronted by the devil with various sly tricks designed to keep them from Christ.

Woven throughout this work is a host of quoted material. Scripture easily takes the first place here, but Brooks, obviously a voluminous reader, quotes authors of every stripe. He draws from the church fathers and contemporary authors, from Greek and Latin classics and histories of the world. A plethora of quaint sayings make the work eminently quotable. Here the reader must not skip over the footnotes. Where most books use notes simply for bibliographic material, Brooks seems to insert some of his meatiest material here. For example, it is in a footnote that he tells the fable "that the butterfly asked the owl how she should deal with the fire which had singed her wings, who counselled her not to behold so much as its smoke" (p. 68).

*Precious Remedies* makes for great devotional reading. Its small sections coupled with insightful and practical advice allow the reader to look forward daily to a conversation with a great Puritan and a walk with God.

Paul V. Harrison  
Cross Timbers Free Will Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee

All of the books reviewed above can be purchased through Randall Bookstore in Nashville, Tennessee.

