

# Systematic Theology

Vincent Cheung

To Denise,

my wife, best friend, companion for life,  
fellow-servant to the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and partner in the publication of his gospel,

to her, I dedicate all my writings,  
with great love and affection, forever.

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# 1. THEOLOGY

Theological reflection is the most important activity a person can perform. This statement may astonish some readers, but an explanation of the theological enterprise will provide justification for the claim. We shall consider the nature, possibility, and necessity of this field of study.

## THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY

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

This book is a presentation of several major biblical doctrines that come under the study of systematic theology. A doctrine consists of a set of ideas or propositions on a topic, so a biblical doctrine is the biblical teaching on a subject. Theology refers to the study of the Bible or the systematic formulation of doctrines from the Bible. A biblical doctrine is always binding, and a system of theology is authoritative to the extent that it reflects the teachings of the Bible.

Many Christians think it is wrong to study theology for its own sake. An anti-intellectual spirit has so infiltrated the church that they refuse to believe that intellectual activity possesses intrinsic value. But this implies that even knowing God must serve a greater purpose, probably a practical or ethical one. Although the knowledge of God ought to affect one's conduct, it is a mistake to think that the intellectual enterprise of theology serves a purpose that is greater than itself. Rather, since to study theology is to know God, and to know God is the highest purpose of man, theology possesses the highest intrinsic value. As Jeremiah 9:23-24 says:

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

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

virtues and other effects in a person's life, but we should not regard them as higher purposes than the knowledge of God and his revelation.

### **THE POSSIBILITY OF THEOLOGY**

Prior to the construction of a theological system, it is necessary to establish that theological knowledge is possible. "God is Spirit" (John 4:24) – he transcends the spatiotemporal existence of man. Thus the question is whether man can know anything about God, or how man can know anything about him. The Bible's answer is that it is possible for man to have knowledge about God because God has revealed himself to man.

The Bible teaches that the universe displays God's glory. The magnitude and excellence of the things that God has created offer testimony to his power and wisdom:

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

However, man does not directly perceive this testimony, and he does not logically infer information about God from it. As Paul writes, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). God has made a point of preventing non-Christians from knowing him through their own wisdom.

Therefore, although the testimony of creation is strong and evident, man cannot gain knowledge about God by an observation of the world. This does not mean that some men have no concept of God in their minds. In fact, the Bible teaches that every man knows about God, but this knowledge does not come from observation. Rather, Paul writes that it has been "written" into the mind of man – it is an innate knowledge:

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

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<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*; Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.; p. 396. The NIV reads, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard."

<sup>2</sup> "So, when gentiles, not having the Law, still through their own *innate sense* behave as the Law commands, then, even though they have no Law, they are a law for themselves. They can demonstrate the

Theologians call the testimony of creation and the innate knowledge in the mind of man God's GENERAL REVELATION.<sup>3</sup> Although all men know about God in this manner, it does not mean that all men consciously acknowledge him. In fact, since all men are sinful, they refuse to acknowledge this God that they know, but attempt to suppress the truth:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:18-21)<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, this knowledge is indestructible and undeniable, so that it surfaces in distorted forms in non-Christian religions, philosophies, and ethical principles.

Thus God has revealed his existence, attributes, and some of his moral demands to every person by including this information in the human mind. This knowledge is innate and is not derived by reasoning from sensation. Man does not infer from what he observes in nature that there must be a God; rather, he knows the God of the Bible before he has any access to empirical data. Interaction with creation, including the act of observation, stimulates the mind of man to recall this innate knowledge, which has been suppressed by sin.

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

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effect of the Law *engraved on their hearts*, to which their own conscience bears witness..." (v. 14-15, NJB).

<sup>3</sup> This is also called natural revelation – God's disclosure of himself through nature, or God's mark in his creation. A system of theology allegedly derived from general or natural revelation is called natural theology. To express biblical teaching in theological terms, we would say that there is a general or natural revelation (Psalm 19:1-3), but it is impossible to derive a natural theology on the basis of this revelation (1 Corinthians 1:21).

<sup>4</sup> "...ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind's understanding of created things. And so these people have no excuse..." (v. 20, NJB).

Although every person has an innate knowledge of the existence and attributes of God, and the universe serves as a constant reminder, general revelation excludes much information about God and his creation, and in particular it does not contain information necessary for salvation – it does not contain the gospel. Thus God has revealed what he has decided to teach us by verbal revelation, that is, the Scripture. In other words, he talks to us and tells us what he wants us to know: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things *revealed* belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all *the words* of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Theology is possible because God has revealed himself to us through the words of the Bible.

This is his SPECIAL REVELATION. It contains rich and precise information about God and the things that he has decided we should learn. It is from the Bible that we obtain knowledge that is necessary for salvation. It is from the Bible that we come to know the message about Jesus Christ, that we need to be saved from sin and hell, and how we can be saved through him:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

It is possible for man to know God through his revelation because God has made man in his own image, so that there is a point of contact between the two despite the transcendence of God. Animals and inanimate objects cannot know God the way man can even if they are presented with his verbal revelation, since they cannot receive and understand it.

God has chosen to reveal information to us through the Bible – in words rather than in images or experiences, to tell instead of to show. His revelation to us is rational and intellectual in nature, and not mystical or empirical. Verbal communication is superior because it can be precise, accurate, and extensive. Since the Bible assumes this form of communication, a worthy theological system must be derived from biblical propositions, and not from a non-verbal basis such as religious feelings and experiences, or irrational constructions such as scientific theories.<sup>5</sup>

Every system of thought begins with a first principle, and on this basis derives the rest by inductive or deductive reasoning, or a combination of the two. Induction is a formal fallacy, since due to the form or structure of the reasoning process, the conclusion is never a logically necessary result of the premises. The fallacy occurs when one reasons from particulars to universals. Now, reasoning on the basis of empirical data requires induction, since sensations are particulars, and every worldview must contain universal concepts and propositions, such as man, car, red, size, and so on. Therefore, induction and empiricism are irrational, and a system that places any dependence on either must

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<sup>5</sup> Science is irrational because it commits the fallacies of empiricism, induction, and affirming the consequent (experimentation).

inevitably collapse into skepticism. Skepticism is the position that knowledge is impossible, but it is self-contradictory, since it maintains that we can know that we cannot know.

Deduction is the only valid form of reasoning. It proceeds from premises to conclusions by logical necessity. However, since deductive reasoning never produces information that is not already implicit in the premises, the first principle of a deductive system must contain all the information for the rest of the system. This means that a first principle that is too narrow will fail to provide a sufficient number of propositions to produce a comprehensive and coherent worldview, or a system of thought that is able to answer all necessary questions. Thus knowledge is impossible on the basis of induction, empiricism, or any inadequate first principle.

Even if a first principle appears to be sufficiently broad and contains enough information to construct a worldview, there must be justification for it, or some reason for affirming it over another. The justification for a first principle cannot come from a higher authority or a prior premise, for then it would not be the first principle. A lower authority or premise within the system cannot justify the first principle, since it is on this very first principle that this lower authority or premise depends. Therefore, a first principle of a system of thought must be self-authenticating – it must stand on its own authority.

The Bible is the ultimate authority of the Christian system; therefore, our first principle, our starting point, or the foundation of our thinking, is the Bible itself. This may be expressed by any proposition that represents all the contents of the Bible, such as "The Bible is truth" or "The Bible is the word of God."

Although empirical, inductive, and scientific arguments have been formulated in support of biblical revelation, and although they seem to be forceful given empirical assumptions, so that no empirically inclined non-Christian can refute them, the Christian must regard these arguments as unreliable because – as I have extensively argued elsewhere – all empirical, inductive, and scientific methods are irrational and prevent the discovery of truth.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, if we were to depend on empirical arguments and procedures to justify the Bible, the empirical assumptions would then stand as judge over the very word of God, so that Scripture would no longer be the ultimate authority in our system. As Hebrews 6:13 says, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself." Since God possesses ultimate authority, there is no higher authority by which one may pronounce the Bible as infallible and inerrant.

That said, not every system that claims divine authority has within its first principle the content to justify itself. A sacred text might contradict itself and self-destructs. Another might admit dependence on the Christian Bible, but the Bible condemns all other alleged revelations. In any case, if the Bible is true, and it claims exclusivity, then all other systems of thought must be false. Therefore, if one affirms a non-Christian worldview –

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<sup>6</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, and Captive to Reason*.



any worldview other than strict biblical Christianity – he must at the same time reject the Bible.

This generates a clash between the two worldviews. When this happens, the Christian can be confident that his system of thought is impervious to the attacks from others, but the biblical system itself provides the content for both defense and offense. The Christian can destroy the non-Christian's worldview by questioning the first principles and the subsidiary propositions of the system. Does the first principle of the system contradict itself? Does it fail to satisfy its own requirements?<sup>7</sup> Does the system crumble because it assumes the reliability of sensation, induction, and the scientific method? Does its subsidiary propositions contradict one another? Does it borrow Christian premises not deducible from its own first principle? Does the system provide coherent answers to the ultimate and the necessary questions, such as those concerning epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics?<sup>8</sup>

The first principle, the starting point, or the foundation of the Christian system is the Bible. From this first principle, the theologian constructs a comprehensive system of thought. To the extent that his reasoning is correct, every part of the system is deduced by logical necessity from the infallible first principle, and is thus equally infallible. And since the Bible is the verbal revelation of God, who demands our worship and commands our conscience, a system of theology validly deduced from revelation is authoritative and binding. Therefore, to the extent that this book is accurate in presenting what Scripture teaches, it represents what Christians have pledged to believe and what all men ought to believe, because it represents universal and objective truths that God has revealed.

### **THE NECESSITY OF THEOLOGY**

Theology is necessary for all of thought and life. Since God is the beginning, the ultimate, and the omnipotent creator, he has the authority to address all aspects of our lives, and he has the power to enforce his commands and his wishes. Therefore, when he speaks, we must listen, believe, and submit. Christian theology systematizes his verbal revelation, and it is authoritative to the extent that it reflects the teachings of the Bible. The necessity of theology is a question of the necessity of communication from God. Since this is God's universe, divine revelation is the infallible and binding source of information and interpretation regarding all of thought and life. Since God has spoken, and since it is necessary to hear him, to believe him, to obey him, and to declare him, theology is necessary.

Theology is central to all of thought and life because it deals with the verbal revelation that comes from the supreme being – the essential reality that gives existence and meaning to everything. To illustrate, ignorance of musical theories has no direct relevance to one's ability to do algebra or to reason about moral issues. A lack of athletic abilities is unlikely to hinder a person's performance in the kitchen. But ignorance of

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

<sup>8</sup> For instructions on biblical philosophy and apologetics, see Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Apologetics in Conversation, and Captive to Reason*.

divine revelation affects all of thought and life, from one's view toward history and philosophy, to one's interpretation of music and literature, to one's understanding of mathematics and physics.

Since this is God's universe, only his interpretation about anything is correct, and he has revealed his thoughts in the words of the Bible. It follows that an ignorance of theology means that a person's interpretation of every subject will lack the defining factor that puts it into the proper perspective. When it comes to ethics, for example, it is impossible to derive or establish any universal moral principle without an appeal to God. Even the very ideas of right and wrong remain undefined without his verbal revelation – he must define these concepts for us, and only his definitions are authoritative, relevant, and binding on all people. And since the Bible is the only objective and public divine revelation, the only way to appeal to God's authority – the only way to construct a public theology, philosophy, or apologetic – is by an appeal to the Bible.

There is intrinsic value in knowledge about God. Whereas every other kind of knowledge is a means to an end, knowledge about God is a worthy end in itself – we do not know God in order to know or to do something more important. Since theology is the study of God, or the systematization and articulation of knowledge about God, in terms of its value, it is self-justified. Of course, the knowledge of God is the foundation for a right knowledge of all other things, and it is the foundation for right purpose, right action, and so on. But its value does not depend on the effect that it has on these other things. It is important and its study is justified just because of what it is. To say that theology is not an end in itself carries the blasphemous implication that God is not the ultimate. And since God has revealed himself through the Scripture, to know the Scripture is to know him, and this means to study theology.

Many Christians have succumbed to the anti-intellectual spirit of the world, and as a result they make a sharp distinction between *knowing* God and *knowing about* God. If to "know about" God represents the study of theology, then to them a person may know much *about* God but not know God, or he may know God but not know much *about* God. A person's theological knowledge is disproportionate to how well he knows God, and some people seem to think that the more one knows about God, the less one knows God. That is, knowing about God is not only distinguished from knowing God, but in some cases, and certainly when it is very emphasized, knowing about God may even hinder a person from knowing God.

This is anti-intellectualism. Another name for it is insanity. Yet, in various forms, it is rampant among those who call themselves Christians, and even those who claim to oppose anti-intellectualism are often infected by this way of thinking. The assumption that poisons theology is that piety is at least somewhat, if not entirely, non-intellectual and non-rational. This assumption is unbiblical, arbitrary, false, and very dangerous.

If it is possible to know God without knowing very much about him, then what does it mean to know God? If knowing God means to have some kind of fellowship with him (1 John 1:3), then it entails at least recognition – one must know *that* he is, *what* he is, and

*how* to fellowship with him. A person who fellowships with God must know that there is a God, that God is a Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and not Allah, or Buddha, his neighbor's cat, or the tree in his backyard. He must know the conditions under which he must relate to this God, and he must know the means and methods that make this fellowship with the Deity possible. All of this entails knowing things – many, many things – *about* God. Fellowship also involves communication, which requires the exchange of thoughts, and this again entails knowledge *about* many, many things, and *about* many words and ideas. One cannot communicate with another without exchanging information in the form of propositions, or in a manner in which the information conveyed is reducible to propositions.

How does a person know God, if not through knowing *about* him? Some people might answer that we know God through religious experience. But religious experience is defined and interpreted by theology, or knowledge *about* God. What is a religious experience? How does a person know he has received one? What does a particular feeling, sensation, or even apparition or encounter mean? Is the experience from God or Satan? The Bible warns that the devil can appear as an angel of light. Answers to these questions can only come by studying God's verbal revelation. And even if it is possible to know God through religious experience, what one gains is still knowledge *about* God, or intellectual information reducible to propositions.

A person may claim to know God through prayer and worship. But what does this mean? Is this just another way of asserting that we know God by religious experience? Do we sense something or undergo a process that permits us to know him better? But again, what is this "better," if it is not a fuller knowledge *about* God? If knowing about God and knowing God can be sharply distinguished, then one must define knowing God in a way that avoids any overlap with knowing about God. We already know what knowing about God means. If knowing God remains undefined, then it might be only a pious-sounding way to say the same thing as knowing about God, and the distinction adds nothing to our faith except confusion and false spirituality.

In any case, the object and practice of prayer and worship remain undefined until a theological formulation about them is established. Before a person can properly pray and worship, he must first determine to whom he offers prayer and worship. Afterward he must determine the way in which he must offer prayer and worship. All this means that a systematic study of Scripture is necessary, because it is Scripture that informs and governs all aspects of Christian beliefs and practices. Therefore, knowledge of God comes from his verbal revelation, and not from non-verbal means of religious exercises. Most people who resist theological studies have not thought through these questions, but they perform prayer and worship by assuming, often without understanding and in error, the object and manner of these spiritual practices.

Still another person might say that we get to know God by walking in love. But again, the idea of love remains undefined until there is theological reflection on the matter. Even the relationship between knowing God and walking in love originates from the Bible:

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

Without biblical passages like this, a person cannot justify the claim that to know God is to walk in love, or that to walk in love is to know God. Also, does John say that we are born of God and know God before we love one another, or that we love one another before we are born of God and know God? It is clear that we are born of God and that we know God before we love one another. It is precisely because we are born of God that we are able to love, and it is because we know God that we realize what love means. Many of those who claim to know God through walking in love are doing nothing other than being kind to others, and they define kindness according to non-Christian norms rather than according to scriptural principles. They possess only an illusion of knowing God.

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

There is one slogan that says, "Give me Jesus, not exegesis." The anti-intellectual attitude is evident. But it is the Bible that gives us information about Jesus, and it is through biblical exegesis that we ascertain its meaning. Therefore, we cannot know Jesus without exegesis. One can illustrate this assertion by questioning those who affirm this slogan on what they know about Jesus. If their version of Jesus differs from the biblical account, then this means that they do not know him after all. Still less can we expect them to grasp other important topics such as biblical inspiration, divine election, and church government. But if they offer an accurate account of Jesus, how did they learn it if not from the Bible? What we need to say is, "Give me Jesus *through* exegesis."

A repudiation of theology is also a refusal to know God through the way he has prescribed. Knowing the Scripture – knowing *about* God – assumes preeminence over all of human thought and life. Theology is the systematic study and expression of the teachings of Scripture. It defines and interprets all that a person thinks and does. It ranks above all other necessities (Luke 10:42); no other task or discipline approaches it in significance. Therefore, the study of theology is the most important human activity.

## 2. SCRIPTURE

The Bible, or Scripture, is the ultimate authority and first principle of the Christian system, and it is the source of our knowledge about God and the things of God. Therefore, it is appropriate to begin the study of theology by considering the attributes of Scripture.

### THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE

Biblical revelation exists in propositional form. Although many people deprecate words in favor of images and feelings, God chose to reveal himself and to communicate with us in the words of human language. Words are able to convey in an exact and univocal manner information from God and about God. This affirms that Scripture is a meaningful divine revelation, and it also affirms that preaching and writing are able to communicate the mind of God as set forth in the Bible.

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

Some people insist that the Bible speaks in a manner that produces vivid mental images. This supposedly shows that although the Bible consists of words, the intended effect of these words is to produce images, and this is implicit endorsement for images as the superior vehicles of communication. The argument is farfetched and desperate. First, its basis is not in the Bible itself, but a claim about the effect that it has in readers. Second, at best it describes the reaction of only some readers; other readers may respond differently. Third, if God wanted to communicate with us through images, he could have inspired the prophets and apostles to draw pictures into the Bible. But there is not even one.

If images are superior, then how come there are no drawings in the Bible? If images are essential to theological communication, the inclusion of drawings would ensure that no one forms the wrong mental pictures when exposed to divine revelation. Even if mental images are intended, the fact that God chose to use words to produce them implies that words are sufficient and superior. Nevertheless, besides word images, the Scripture also uses words to discuss the things of God in abstract terms, not associated with any images.<sup>1</sup>

Suppose we show a drawing of Christ's crucifixion to a person who has no knowledge of the Christian faith. Without any verbal explanation, it would be impossible for him to ascertain that Christ himself was innocent, that he died to satisfy God's wrath, and that he did this to redeem those whom God had chosen before the creation of the world. The

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<sup>1</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *The View from Above*.

picture suggests no relationship between the event to anything divine or spiritual. It does not show whether the event was historical or fictional. And there would be no way of knowing the words Christ spoke when he was on the cross. The image carries no theological meaning. And unless there are at least several hundred words to explain it, no proper interpretation is possible. But once there are that many words to explain it, the picture has become unnecessary. A picture is not worth a thousand words. It cannot even replace one word. If there were ten million pictures to depict every detail of the life of Christ, there would still be no intelligible gospel. If there is no gospel, then there is no salvation, and the person who is shown these picture would remain in his sin and destined for hell, befuddled rather than enlightened by our massive art collection.

Any view that extols music over verbal communication suffers similar criticisms. It is impossible to derive any meaning or any religious content from music if it is performed without words. The Book of Psalms is a large collection of songs, and provides us with a rich heritage for worship, doctrine, and reflection. However, this whole heritage consists of words. The original tunes are conspicuously absent. No musical notation is found in any part of the Bible. Thus God's design in the inspiration of Scripture shows that the value of the biblical psalms is in the words and not the tunes. Music plays a secondary role in worship; that is, compared to the words of Scripture and the ministry of preaching, the tunes themselves are unimportant. Whether we sing John 3:16 to the tune of a birthday song or a company jingle has no effect on the content. But if the lyrics revert back to the birthday or the products, then even a Bach tune cannot save us.

As for religious experiences, when it comes to communicating information, even a vision of Christ cannot replace a thousand words from Scripture. Without knowledge of the Scripture, a person cannot evaluate any religious experience, whether it is a healing miracle or an angelic visitation. Religious experiences, without verbal communication, do not carry their own interpretation, so that the most spectacular supernatural encounters remain unintelligible without words to inform the mind with definite information. And just as ten thousand images cannot match the intelligibility of even one word or sentence, even a vision of God requires verbal interpretation. This is not an irreverent remark, since it is God himself who sends us his words and commands us to heed them. Rather, it is irreverent to assert that his words are unnecessary or that some other means of communication is superior to the one that he has chosen.

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

Another erroneous position toward the Bible is to regard it as a mere record of revelatory events, rather than God's revelation itself. That is, the Bible is not revelation, but a record of revelation – revelation as such consists not in words and propositions, but in things

such as creation, miracles, divine appearances, the "person" of Christ, his acts of compassion and sacrifice, and so on. It is true that, in a sense, a miracle can be considered revelation, but *about* what does the miracle reveal? Does it reveal something *about* God, or the devil? And *what* about God does the miracle reveal? Does it reveal that he is powerful, that he is compassionate, or that he can do things to help people but usually does not? What are we supposed to derive from a miracle? We need words to tell us the principles by which to interpret these events, and then we need words to state the interpretations of these events. Otherwise, one interpretation is just as invalid as its opposite, since without a standard of interpretation, no interpretation can be a necessary inference from any event. Thus the events in themselves reveal nothing unless there is an abundance of words to interpret them. The words themselves constitute the revelation. Since they constitute *what* is revealed, they are identified with revelation.

Some people are afraid that a strong devotion to Scripture would imply that we prize the record of a revelatory event more than the event itself. The event possesses special value because it is regarded as revelation. But if Scripture is itself revelation, then this concern is misguided. As Paul explains, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). The words of the Bible were breathed out by God. If that is not revelation, then nothing is revelation. And how can words breathed out by God himself be less of a revelation than a miracle or even the person of Christ? This way of thinking pits God against himself, and results in complete confusion.

Moreover, even if we regard the events recorded in the Bible as revelation, we have no direct contact with them. The only public and persistent revelation we have contact with is the Bible. It is self-defeating to deprecate a revelation that we do possess in favor of a kind of revelation that we do not. God did not only design and cause the events that the words of the Bible describe and interpret, but he also selected and caused to be written these very words that we find in the Bible. And many statements in the Bible do not correspond to personal appearances, actions, or events; rather, the propositions alone constitute the revelation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

Since this high view of Scripture is the one that Scripture itself affirms, it is the only one that is rightly called Christian, and every Christian is required to agree with it. As long as a person denies that the Bible is itself divine revelation, it remains nothing more than an ordinary book, so that he would hesitate to offer it complete reverence, as if it is possible to excessively adore it.

There are preachers who tell believers that they should look to "the Lord of the book, not the book of the Lord," or something to this effect. But since the words of Scripture were breathed out by God, and those words constitute the only public and explicit revelation from God, it is impossible to look to the Lord without looking to his book. In fact, since the words of Scripture are the very words of God, a person is looking to the Lord only to the extent that he is looking to the words of the Bible. A "person" is identified with his thoughts and his words. Someone who tells me, "I agree with you, as in the person, but I

disagree with your thoughts and your words," is not clever or respectful, but insane. To agree with me is to agree with my thoughts and my words. There is no difference.

Our contact with God is through the words of the Bible. Proverbs 22:17-21 indicates that to trust the Lord is to trust his words:

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

God rules and teaches his church through the Bible; therefore, our attitude toward it reflects our attitude toward God. Anyone who loves God will love his words just as much, and he will not distinguish between the two. Those who claim to love God ought to demonstrate it by a zealous obsession with his words:

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

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

A person loves God only to the extent that he loves the Bible. Love for the Bible is the standard by which all other aspects of spiritual life are measured.

### **THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE**

The Bible is the verbal revelation of God. It is God speaking to us. It is the voice of God itself. The very nature of the Bible indicates that the best way to communicate divine revelation is by means of words. We know God by studying the words of God, that is, the words of the Bible. It is the most precise, accurate, and comprehensive source of information about God available to us.

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



All the words of the Bible were breathed out by God.<sup>2</sup> He caused the human writers to set down the exact words that he wanted to use in order to communicate his thoughts. This is the doctrine of DIVINE INSPIRATION.

Scripture, or the Bible, consists of the Old and New Testaments, sixty-six documents in total, functioning as an organic whole. The apostle Peter, of course, recognizes the Old Testament as Scripture. But when he endorses Paul's writings, he calls them Scripture as well, and puts them on the same level as the writings of the prophets:

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

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

The Bible is an exact verbal revelation from God, so that Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not *the smallest letter*, not *the least stroke of a pen*, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18). God exercised such precise control over the Bible's production that its content, to the very letter, is what he desired to set in writing. The Bible reveals God's nature and God's mind in an exact and univocal manner.

There is the objection that this high view of Scripture implies a dictation theory of biblical inspiration, and since the various documents in Scripture seem to reflect the different personalities, backgrounds, and literary styles of the writers, the dictation theory must be ruled out, and so divine inspiration is excluded as well. However, this is an unintelligent objection.

Christians scramble to deny the dictation theory, but there is nothing inherently absurd or impossible about it. God could have dictated his thoughts to reflect a variety of personalities and literary styles to suit his purposes and to manifest his manifold wisdom. There is no need to renounce the principle of dictation, since there is nothing wrong with it. And as indicated by the prophets themselves, significant portions of the Bible were indeed dictated and written down. Perhaps the most prominent example is the Ten Commandments – God himself wrote on the tablets as he spoke, but Moses also recorded the exact words that God said. Many dictated passages are found, and clearly marked, in

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<sup>2</sup> The word translated "given by inspiration of God" (KJV) or "inspired by God" (NASB) is *theopneustos*. It means expiration (to breathe out) rather than inspiration (to breathe in), so that the NIV translates it as "God-breathed." Although "inspiration" is an acceptable theological term referring to the divine origin of Scripture, and as such the word remains useful, it does not convey the literal meaning of *theopneustos*.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, many of the other prophets, and all passages where God's words are marked out as direct quotations.

Given the power and wisdom of God, the objection against dictation is irrelevant, and is immediately defeated. It is an unthinking reaction to the doctrine of inspiration based on prejudice and false assumptions about how God must reveal himself in words, or if he had chosen dictation, how it must have occurred. But God's ability defies human restrictions. It is a matter of interest as to whether divine inspiration happened this way or whether it happened in some other way, but there is no inherent problem with dictation.

In any case, a high view of Scripture does not imply that all of it must have been revealed by dictation. And even when dictation occurred, God did not dictate his word to the prophets and apostles as a man would dictate his letters to a secretary. A person might assume that dictation is the highest form of inspiration, since it is the most familiar human situation in which a writer records the exact words of another person. However, dictation in this human context does not model the highest form of inspiration.

A man may dictate his words to the secretary, but he has no control over the details of the secretary's life – her birth, family, education, personality, circumstances, and even her very thoughts. In contrast, the Bible teaches that God exercises total control over every detail of his creation, to the extent that even the thoughts of men are under his control.<sup>3</sup> This is true regarding the biblical writers. God so ordained, directed, and controlled the thoughts and lives of his chosen instruments, that when the time came, their personalities and backgrounds were perfectly suited to write those portions of Scripture he had assigned to them:

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

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

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

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<sup>3</sup> The Bible denies that man has "free will." Although the will of man exists as a function of the mind, it is not "free" in the sense that it can operate apart from God's constant and complete control.

God did not *find* the right people to write Scripture, but he *created* the right people to write it, and then he *caused* them to write it.<sup>4</sup> At the time of writing, the Spirit of God controlled them in such a deliberate and complete manner that they wrote down materials that were beyond what their natural intelligence could conceive.<sup>5</sup> The product was God's verbal revelation, and it was to the very letter what he desired to set in writing. And by his control of nature, history, and mankind, he has preserved his book to this day.

Therefore, the inspiration of the Bible does not refer only to the times when God exercised special control over the writers, although he indeed exercised this control, but the preparation began even before the creation of the world. God controls every detail of every person, and thus every biblical writer, and not just when they sat down to write Scripture. In comparison, mere dictation is weaker and implies a lower view of Scripture, since it ascribes to God less control over the process.

This view of inspiration explains the so-called "human element" in Scripture. The biblical documents reflect the various social, economic, and intellectual backgrounds of the authors, their different personalities, and their unique vocabularies and literary styles. This phenomenon is what one would expect given the biblical view of inspiration, in which God exercised complete control over their lives, circumstances, even their very thoughts, and not only the writing process. Therefore, the "human element" in Scripture is part of what God intended to produce, so that it does not damage the doctrine of inspiration, but it is consistent with it and explained by it.

### **THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE**

The inspiration of Scripture implies the unity of Scripture. The fact that the words of Scripture proceeded from one rational divine mind implies that it should exhibit perfect coherence. This is what we find in the Bible. Although the personality and literary style of each writer is evident, the design and the unity of the Bible indicate a single divine author. Each scriptural document exhibits perfect internal consistency, and all the documents are consistent with one another. The Bible never contradicts itself.

Jesus affirms the coherence of Scripture, and he assumes this in all of his teachings and applications of the Bible. This is demonstrated in his response to Satan's temptation:

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

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<sup>4</sup> Some call this position ORGANIC INSPIRATION, but others consider the term ambiguous or misleading. The point is that God did not merely suggest or dictate words to the writers, but he controlled all the details of their thoughts and lives. The biblical doctrine of inspiration is far more ambitious than mere dictation.

<sup>5</sup> Scripture exceeds what men could produce without divine inspiration, but it is not beyond the ability of men to understand.

Satan urges Jesus to jump from the temple on the basis of Psalm 91:11-12. Jesus counters with Deuteronomy 6:16, suggesting that Satan's use of the passage contradicts the instruction from Deuteronomy, and therefore it is a misapplication. When a person interprets a passage of Scripture in a manner that contradicts another passage, he mishandles the text. Christ's argument assumes the unity of Scripture, and even the devil does not challenge it.

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

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

Since David was "speaking by the Spirit," he could not have erred. But if Christ was to be David's descendent, how could he also be David's Lord? The fact that this poses a problem in the first place means that both Jesus and the Pharisees assume the unity of Scripture and the law of noncontradiction. If they believe that the Scripture contradicts itself, or if they think that a person can affirm two propositions that contradict each other, then Jesus would not be making a meaningful point. The answer is that the Messiah would be both human and divine, and therefore David's "son" and "Lord."

Nevertheless, it is popular to tolerate contradictions in theology. Alister McGrath writes in his *Understanding Doctrine*:

The fact that something is paradoxical and even self-contradictory does not invalidate it...Those of us who have worked in the scientific field are only too aware of the sheer complexity and mysteriousness of reality. The events lying behind the rise of quantum theory, the difficulties of using models in scientific explanation – to name but two factors which I can remember particularly clearly from my own period as a natural scientist – point to the inevitability of paradox and contradiction in any except the most superficial engagement with reality....<sup>6</sup>

This is nonsense. Granting that McGrath knows enough science to speak on the subject, this is a testimony against science, and not an argument for embracing contradictions in theology. He assumes the reliability of science and judges all other disciplines by it. His

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<sup>6</sup> Alister McGrath, *Understanding Doctrine*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990; p. 138.

thinking is that if there are contradictions in science, then contradictions must be acceptable, and we must accept them in theology as well.

However, the fact that science often contradicts itself is a reason to maintain that it is irrational and unreliable, and not a reason to permit contradictions in other fields of study. Science is an irrational discipline of speculation about reality. Sometimes its theories happen to correlate with effects that we desire, but it cannot discover any truth about reality. Knowledge about reality comes from valid deductions from biblical revelation, and never from scientific or empirical methods.<sup>7</sup> McGrath gives no argument for us to ignore or tolerate the contradictions in science; rather, he assumes the reliability of science despite the contradictions. There is no justification for this.

What makes science the standard by which we must judge all other disciplines? What gives science the right to make the rules for all other fields of study? McGrath states that science points "to the inevitability of paradox and contradiction in any except the most superficial engagement with reality." But science is not theology. Science contradicts itself and crumbles, but this does not mean that theology suffers the same fate. In fact, McGrath has a very big problem. His statement implies that unless God contradicts himself when he speaks to us, his words are "most superficial." He is right that science contradicts itself, but the application to theology is false.

In any case, theology deals with God, who has the right and power to govern all of thought and life. God knows the nature of reality, and communicates it to us through the Bible. Therefore, it is theology that makes the rules for science, and a biblical system of theology contains no paradoxes or contradictions. In his attempt to deny this, McGrath commits himself to the blasphemy that God is either inconsistent, or he is superficial. He seems to think that if men cannot talk about reality without contradictions, then even God cannot tell us about reality without contradictions. This is how much McGrath thinks of men, or rather, this is how little he thinks of God.

For any proposition that affirms X, the proposition that contradicts it is one that affirms not-X. This is what a contradiction means. Any proposition that affirms one thing is by necessity also a denial of its opposite. To affirm X is to deny not-X, and to affirm not-X is to deny X. To keep this simple, let us assume that Y = not-X, so that the opposite of X is Y. Thus to affirm X is to deny Y, and to affirm Y is to deny X. Or, X = not-Y, and Y = not-X. Then, since to affirm a proposition is to deny its opposite, to affirm X and Y at the same time is the equivalent of affirming not-Y and not-X. Thus to affirm two contradictory propositions is in reality to deny both. But to affirm both not-Y and not-X is also to affirm X and Y, which again means to deny Y and X. And so the whole operation becomes meaningless. The upshot is that it is impossible to affirm two contradictory propositions at the same time.

To affirm the proposition, "Adam is a man" (X), is to deny the contradictory proposition, "Adam is not a man" (Y, or not-X). Likewise, to affirm the proposition, "Adam is not a man" (Y), is to deny the contradictory proposition, "Adam is a man" (X). Now, to affirm

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<sup>7</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions and Presuppositional Confrontations*.

both "Adam is a man" (X) and "Adam is not a man" (Y) is only to deny both propositions in reverse order. That is, it is equivalent to denying "Adam is not a man" (Y) and "Adam is a man" (X). But then we are back to affirming the two propositions in reverse order again. When we affirm both, we deny both; when we deny both, we affirm both. Therefore, there is no intelligible meaning in affirming two contradictory propositions. It is to say nothing and to believe nothing.

To illustrate, it is clear that divine sovereignty and human freedom contradict each other.<sup>8</sup> If God controls everything, including man's thoughts, then man is not free from God. If man is free from God in any sense or to any degree, then God does not control everything.<sup>9</sup> Yet some theologians claim that the Bible teaches both divine sovereignty and human freedom, and so they insist that we must affirm both. However, since to affirm divine sovereignty is to deny human freedom, and to affirm human freedom is to deny divine sovereignty, then to affirm both only means to reject both divine sovereignty (in the form of an affirmation of human freedom) and human freedom (in the form of an affirmation of divine sovereignty). But to deny both means to affirm both in reverse order, and to affirm both means to deny both in reverse order again.

The necessary result is that the person who claims to believe both divine sovereignty and human freedom believes neither. In claiming to believe all of the Bible, he in fact believes none of it. In this example, since the Bible affirms divine sovereignty and denies human freedom, there is no contradiction – not even an apparent one. On the other hand, when non-Christians allege that the incarnation of Christ entails a contradiction, the Christian does not have the option to deny either the divinity or the humanity of Christ. Rather, he must formulate the doctrine as the Bible teaches it, and show that there is no contradiction. The same applies for the doctrine of the Trinity. In any case, if a person claims that he sees contradictions in the Bible, this means that he does not – he cannot – believe the Bible.

A popular response is that these are only apparent contradictions; that is, the doctrines only seem like contradictions to the mind of men, but they are in perfect harmony in the mind of God. This answer is futile. There is no difference between an apparent contradiction and an actual contradiction when it comes to affirming it. It remains that to affirm one thing is to deny the other at the same time, so that to affirm both is to deny both, and that to deny both is to affirm both again. Thus the person who affirms an apparent contradiction really affirms nothing and denies nothing. Whether the contradiction is only an apparent one is irrelevant. As long as it appears real to the person, it is real enough.

Moreover, how can a person distinguish between an apparent contradiction from an actual contradiction? He can never know that a contradiction is only an apparent one.

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<sup>8</sup> The doctrine of divine sovereignty will be discussed and applied throughout this book. Also see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Ephesians* and *The Author of Sin*.

<sup>9</sup> The doctrine of compatibilism teaches that man is not free from God, but that man is still free in a sense. However, unless the kind of freedom under consideration is freedom from God, it is irrelevant, since the topic concerns God's control over man. See Vincent Cheung, *The Author of Sin*.

Unless he knows how to resolve the apparent contradiction, it will appear the same to him as an actual contradiction. And if he *knows* that a contradiction is only an apparent one, then he has already resolved it, and the term contradiction no longer applies. If we must tolerate apparent contradictions, then we must tolerate all contradictions. We often challenge non-Christian views on the basis that they contradict themselves. But if we tolerate apparent contradictions, then there is nothing to prevent non-Christians from claiming that the contradictions in their worldviews are only apparent ones.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones illustrates how the tradition of embracing paradox has poisoned our theology. He makes Christians look like fools before the world. This is so ridiculous that I must make a point of saying that these are two consecutive paragraphs, with no interruption in between:

Above all, we shall have to realise that there are certain things which we, with our finite minds, will not be able to reconcile with one another. Now I am trying to avoid the use of technical terms as far as I can, but here I must introduce the word antinomy — not antimony. *What is an antinomy? It is a position in which you are given two truths which you yourself cannot reconcile. There are certain final antinomies in the Bible, and as people of faith we must be ready to accept that.* When somebody says, "Oh, but you cannot reconcile those two," you must be ready to say, "I cannot. I do not pretend to be able to. I do not know. I believe what I am told in the Scripture."

So, then, we approach this great doctrine like this: in the light of the things we have already considered about the being, the nature, and the character of God, this doctrine of the eternal decrees must follow as an utter, absolute necessity. Because God is who and what He is, He must work in the way in which He does work. *As we have seen, all the doctrines in the Bible are consistent with one another, and when we are considering any particular doctrine we must remember that it must always be consistent with everything else.* So as we come to study what the Bible tells us about the way in which God works, we must be very careful not to say anything that contradicts what we have already said about His omniscience, His omnipotence, and all the other things that we have agreed together are to be found in the Scriptures.<sup>10</sup>

In the first paragraph, he insists on contradiction. In the second, he insists on coherence. It is difficult to ascertain the precise reason for this insanity. Perhaps the first paragraph shows that he has been infected with the human tradition that there are contradictions in the Bible, whether apparent or actual, and that piety entails paradox. And perhaps the second paragraph expresses what he is compelled to admit, that if the Bible is true, it must be self-consistent, and that if we are to understand the Bible, or if we are to affirm

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<sup>10</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible, Vol. 1* (Crossway), p. 95-96.

the Bible, then we must perceive it as self-consistent, with no apparent or actual contradictions. In any case, he says, "There are certain things which we, with our finite minds, will not be able to reconcile with one another." But if these two paragraphs provide any indication, it would appear that some minds are vastly more finite than others.<sup>11</sup>

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

### **THE INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE**

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

The INFALLIBILITY of Scripture refers to the impossibility of error or an inability to err – the Bible *cannot* err. On the other hand, the INERRANCY of Scripture emphasizes that the Bible *does not* err. The former refers to the potential, while the latter addresses the actual state of affairs. Now, it is possible for a person to be fallible but produces a text that is free from error. The possibility of error does not guarantee error. People who are capable of making mistakes nonetheless do not constantly make mistakes. Thus infallibility implies inerrancy, but inerrancy does not necessarily imply infallibility. Therefore, strictly speaking, infallibility is the stronger word, and it entails inerrancy, but sometimes the two are interchangeable in usage. In any case, since our position is that the Bible cannot err and that it does not err, we say that it is both infallible and inerrant.

There are those who reject the inerrancy of Scripture, but at the same time desire to affirm, in some sense, the perfection of God and that the Bible is his word, and so they maintain the strange position that the Bible is infallible but errant. In other words, the Bible cannot contain error, but it does contain error. This is absurd and impossible. Sometimes what they mean is that the Bible is infallible in one sense, perhaps when it talks about spiritual things, while it contains errors in another sense, perhaps when it talks about historical matters. However, biblical statements about spiritual things are inseparably bound to biblical statements about history, so that it is impossible to affirm one and reject the other.

For example, it is impossible to separate what Scripture says about the resurrection of Christ as an event of history and what it says about the spiritual meaning of this event. If the resurrection did not happen as the Bible says it did, then what it says about its

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<sup>11</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Blasphemy and Mystery*.



spiritual significance cannot be true. And if what it says about its spiritual significance is true, then it must also be affirmed that the resurrection happened as the Bible says it did. This is because the spiritual significance of the resurrection depends on its historicity, that Jesus Christ died in his physical body, and was buried, but was then physically raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God.

Those who reject biblical infallibility and inerrancy have no authoritative epistemological principle by which they can judge one part of Scripture to be true and another part to be false. Since the Bible is the only objective source of information from which the Christian system is constructed, a person who considers any portion of Scripture as fallible or errant must reject the whole of Christianity. And accordingly, we can reject his claim to be a Christian.

A person cannot question or reject the ultimate authority of a system of thought and still claim allegiance to it, since the ultimate authority in any system defines and produces the entire system. Once a person questions or rejects the ultimate authority of a system, he is no longer an adherent of the system, but he is one who adheres to the principle by which he questions or rejects the ultimate authority of the system that he has abandoned. To have an ultimate authority other than the Scripture is to reject the Scripture, since the Bible itself claims to be infallible and ultimate. Therefore, a person who rejects biblical infallibility and inerrancy assumes the intellectual position of a non-Christian, and he must proceed to defend and justify his worldview against the Christian's arguments for the truth of the biblical faith.

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

## **THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE**

The extent of the Bible's authority determines the level of control that it has over our lives. The inspiration, unity, and infallibility of Scripture imply that it possesses absolute authority. Since the Scripture is the very word of God, or God speaking, the necessary conclusion is that it carries the authority of God. Therefore, the authority of Scripture is identical to the authority of God.

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

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

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

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

Then *the LORD* said to Moses, "Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me...But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth...'" (Exodus 9:13-16)

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

Whereas the Genesis passage says that it was "the Lord" who spoke to Abraham, Galatians says, "The Scripture foresaw...[The Scripture] announced...." The passage from Exodus states that it was "the Lord" who told Moses what to say to Pharaoh, but Romans says, "the Scripture says to Pharaoh...." If we believe that the Bible is the word of God, then we would also refer to God and the Scripture as if they are identical. We would personify the Bible as the Bible does to itself. Anyone who never does this probably does not believe that the Bible is the word of God.

Since God possesses absolute authority, the Bible also carries absolute authority. Since there is no difference between God speaking and the Bible speaking, there is no difference between obeying God and obeying the Bible. To believe and obey the Bible is to believe and obey God; to disbelieve and disobey the Bible is to disbelieve and disobey God. The Bible is more than an instrument through which God speaks to us; rather, the words of the Bible are the very words that God speaks – there is no difference. The Bible is God's voice, and the authority of Scripture is total.

### **THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE**

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

Biblical revelation is the only justifiable first principle from which one may deduce information about ultimate issues such as metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Knowledge belonging to subsidiary categories such as politics and biology are also limited to propositions deducible from revelation. Without revelation as the starting point, knowledge is impossible. Any other first principle fails to justify itself, and so a system that depends on it cannot even begin.

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

An earlier section points out that all men know that the Christian God exists, and that he is the only God. Men are born with this knowledge. Although this knowledge is sufficient to condemn unbelief and disobedience, it is insufficient for salvation. A person gains knowledge about the work of Christ either directly from Scripture, or indirectly as someone preaches or writes about the Christian faith on the basis of Scripture.

Therefore, the Bible is necessary for knowledge leading to salvation, instructions leading to spiritual growth, answers to the ultimate questions, and for knowledge about reality. It is the necessary precondition for all knowledge and for any rational apprehension of God and the universe.

### **THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE**

Christians must avoid two extremes regarding the clarity of Scripture. One maintains that Scripture is totally obscure to the average person, so that only an elite group of professionals can interpret it. The other view claims that the Scripture is so simple that nothing in it is difficult to understand, and that no training in hermeneutics is required to handle the text. By extension, a seasoned theologian's exposition is no more reliable than an unlearned person's opinion.

The former position closes off the Scripture from the general populace, and prevents anyone from challenging the interpretations of professionals. But the other position is also dangerous. The Bible is not so simple that every person can interpret it with equal ease and accuracy. Referring to Paul's writings, the apostle Peter says, "His letters contain some things that are hard to understand." He warns that "ignorant and unstable people distort" Paul's words, "as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

Many people would like to think of themselves as competent in important matters such as theology and hermeneutics, but instead of praying for wisdom and studying the Scripture, they merely assume that they are as capable as the theologians or their own pastors. This way of thinking results in confusion and disaster. Anyone can be taught to understand the Bible better. It is not necessary to be trained by professors and seminaries. It is even

possible to be self-taught, to learn from books, or even as Paul says, to be taught by God. One way or another, a person must be taught and trained. One's education, diligence, reverence, and divine endowment all contribute to his ability to interpret and apply the Bible.

There are those who consider a seminary education the only adequate training. Of course, many of these are seminary students and graduates, and this claim elevates their kind into a form of exclusive priesthood. But it is pure rubbish, and there is no reason for anyone to accept it. Indeed, the very fact that they espouse this human invention shows that their seminary education is inadequate, and that they remain grossly incompetent and unspiritual. The Holy Spirit is not dead, and there is nothing in the Bible that requires him to teach his people through seminaries, or even through churches. Anyone who affirms the priesthood of all believers, that Christ alone is the mediator between God and man, must also agree that it is possible for anyone to pick up the Bible and be guided to the truth by God without any human teacher. Just because the church is a God-ordained institution does not mean that it is another mediator between God and man along with Jesus Christ. It does what God says it does, and no more. Nevertheless, the point remains that, no matter how it happens, a person must receive reliable teaching on the doctrines of Scripture and the interpretation of Scripture. Anyone who asserts an interpretation must be able to provide a sober, reverent, and logical explanation for it.

This is not to undermine the place of preachers and theologians, but to maintain their role as servants of Christ, and not as an elite class of believers. In fact, even though many passages in the Bible are easy to understand, some of them require extra diligence and wisdom to interpret. It is possible for a person to read the Scripture and gain from it sufficient understanding and knowledge for salvation, although sometimes one may need help from a reliable believer:

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

It is also possible to learn the basic tenets of the Christian faith by reading the Bible without human aid. But some passages can be difficult to understand. In those cases, a person may enlist the assistance of preachers and theologians to explain the passages, but we must insist that they are never necessary in any particular instance, since only Christ is the true teacher and mediator.

Nehemiah 8:8 affirms the place of the preaching ministry: "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read." The final authority rests in the statements of Scripture, and not in the interpretations of scholars. The Bible is never wrong, although our

understanding of it and inferences from it may sometimes be invalid.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, every church should train its members in theology, hermeneutics, and logic, so that they may better handle the word of truth.

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

As for those whom God has chosen and endowed to be ministers of doctrine, they are able to handle the more difficult passages in Scripture, and they can extract valuable insights from it that may elude others. Ephesians 4:7-13 refers to this office as one of Christ's gifts to his church, and therefore Christians ought to value and respect those standing in such a ministry.

This generation despises authority. People hate being told what to do or what to believe, although they think this way in part because they have been told to do so. Most people do not respect even the authority of God or Scripture, let alone the authority of the church and its ministers. They consider their opinion just as good as that of the apostles, or at least that of the preachers and the theologians. Their religion is democratic, not authoritarian. But the Bible commands Christians to obey their leaders: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:17). Every Christian has the right to read the Bible and follow God directly, with Christ as his sole mediator. But this must not translate into illegitimate defiance<sup>14</sup> against the learned teaching of scholars or the authority of church leaders.

## **THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE**

Many Christians claim to affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, but their actual thinking and practice deny it. The doctrine affirms that the Bible contains sufficient information for a person not only to find salvation in Christ, but afterward to receive instruction and

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<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, this does not turn interpretation into a matter of mere opinion, since the validity of inferences from Scripture is an objective matter – that is, logic is objective – so that all interpretations can be proved or refuted with an objective definiteness.

<sup>14</sup> Since there is no difference between obeying God and obeying Scripture, and since Scripture is our direct contact with the revealed will of God, the immediate object of our allegiance is the Bible (Acts 17:11), by which we may test the teachings and practices of those with learning and authority in the church. Therefore, teachings and practices that deny biblical doctrines constitute sufficient grounds to defy human authority. "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29).

guidance in every aspect of thought and life, either by the explicit statements of Scripture, or by necessary inferences from it.

The Bible contains all that is necessary to construct a complete worldview, a true view of reality. It conveys to us not only the will of God in the general matters of Christian faith and conduct, but by applying biblical precepts, we can also know his will when making specific and personal decisions. Everything that we need to know as Christians is found in the Bible.

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

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

The necessary implication is that extra-biblical means of guidance such as visions and prophecies are unnecessary; however, since the Bible does not declare that they have ceased, God may still grant them whenever he pleases. Whether God still speaks to people in these special ways is another question, but there is no biblical justification to deny the possibility.

We must defy theologians who insist that God no longer performs the miraculous or speaks to people in special ways, because they assert this not on the basis of solid deduction from Scripture, as they themselves might demand for all other doctrines, but by imposing artificial schemes on Scripture concerning the progress of revelation, and by other farfetched arguments. Both cessationism and fanaticism are wrong. But the doctrine of God's sovereignty is always right, and we must not compromise it in any way and to any degree in favor of human tradition or to appease religious pressure.

That said, problems occur when Christians deny that the Bible is sufficient to provide comprehensive instruction and guidance. Some of them complain that the Bible lacks specific information they need to make personal decisions. However, in light of Paul's words – that is, since God asserts through his apostle that the Bible is sufficient – the deficiency must be in these individuals and not in the Bible.

They lack the information they need because of their immaturity and ignorance. The Bible is indeed sufficient to guide them, but they neglect to study it. Some of them also exhibit strong rebellion, so that although the Bible clearly addresses their situations, they refuse to obey its commands and instructions. Or, they refuse to accept the very method of receiving guidance from Scripture in the first place, but insist that God must guide them, at least occasionally, through visions, dreams, and prophecies, although he has already written down what they need to know in the Bible.

When God does not grant their demand for extra-biblical guidance, some of them even decide to seek information through forbidden methods, such as astrology, divination, and other occult practices. Their rebellion is such that if God does not provide the desired information in the ways that they prefer, or if he does not agree with their desires, then they are determined to get what they want from the devil.

Knowledge of God's will comes from an intellectual understanding and application of Scripture.<sup>15</sup> Paul writes:

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

Christian theology must affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, that it is a comprehensive source of information, instruction, and guidance. The Bible contains the whole will of God, including the information a person needs for salvation, spiritual development, and personal guidance. It contains sufficient information so that, if one were to fully obey it, he would fulfill the will of God in every detail of life, and he sins to the extent he disobeys. Although we will not attain perfect obedience in this life, it remains that the Bible contains all the information required to live a perfect Christian life.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Godliness with Contentment*, "Biblical Guidance and Decision-Making."

<sup>16</sup> For more on the sufficiency of Scripture, see Vincent Cheung, *The Ministry of the Word*.

### 3. GOD

Whereas the doctrine of Scripture is the epistemological foundation of the Christian faith, the doctrine of God is the metaphysical foundation. The two doctrines are of supreme importance because all other biblical doctrines depend on them. Therefore, Christians must offer special attention to these aspects of theology. Having discussed the doctrine of Scripture in the previous chapter, we will proceed to consider the existence, attributes, and works of God.

#### THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The Bible says that he who comes to God must believe that he exists (Hebrews 11:6). A person who denies God's existence cannot develop a relationship with him or consciously serve him.<sup>1</sup> There are two kinds of arguments for the existence of God. The first may be called the traditional or classical arguments. Although various theologians and philosophers have favored them throughout history, they are not necessarily valid or sufficient. The second kind of arguments are derived from Scripture itself, and so they may be called biblical arguments.

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT argues from the idea of God to his necessary existence. By definition, God is the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and since the being than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot be conceived as lacking the property of being, for otherwise it would not be the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, God must exist by necessity.

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> Since God controls every detail of his creation, even those who deny his existence think and act only as God wills, and in this sense they "serve" his purposes. However, they are unaware of God's control over them, and they think that they are autonomous. Their thoughts and actions, all decreed by God, lead to damnation.



Even the Fool, then, is forced to agree that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the mind, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood is in the mind. And surely that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. If then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in the mind alone, this same that-than-which-a-greater-*cannot*-be-thought is that-than-which-a-greater-*can*-be-thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists both in the mind and in reality.

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

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

...No one, indeed, understanding what God is can think that God does not exist, even though he may say these words in his heart either without any signification or with some peculiar signification. For God is that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought. Whoever really understands this understands clearly that this same being so exists that not even in thought can it not exist. Thus whoever understands that God exists in such a way cannot think of Him as not existing.<sup>2</sup>

An initial objection is that just because a being is conceivable, or just because it exists in the mind, does not mean that it must also exist in reality. A person may conceive of a

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<sup>2</sup> *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*; Oxford University Press, 1998; p. 87-89.

perfect car, but that does not mean it exists other than in his mind. A flying horse is conceivable, but this tells us nothing as to whether it exists in reality.

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

There is ambiguity concerning what it means for something to exist "in reality." What exists in the mind does not necessarily exist in the physical world, but this is irrelevant because God is incorporeal. When the ontological argument suggests that once the idea of God is present in the mind, he must also be understood to exist, it does not mean that he must be understood to exist as a physical object.

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

Perhaps we should not be asking, "Does God exist?" A more intelligible question is, "What is God?" Even Zeus "exists," but only in mythology. The Christian God is not a physical object, but neither is he like dreams, equations, or Zeus. Rather, he is the creator and ruler of the universe, who decrees our history and decides our destiny, and who deserves and demands our worship. We should certainly say that God "exists" or that God "is" (Hebrews 11:6) insofar as this represents an affirmation of all that the Bible says about him, and not that he is a physical object or mythological character.

THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT argues from contingent effects to the first cause, or the creator God. The argument may begin from self-consciousness or the existence of the physical universe.<sup>3</sup> Everything that has a beginning – everything that has come into being – is an effect, and thus must have a cause. If the universe has a beginning, then it must have a cause. The universe indeed has a beginning, and therefore it must have a cause. An infinite regression of causes is impossible; therefore, there must be a first cause that is not an effect and that has no beginning, but that is necessary and eternal. This cause or being we acknowledge to be God. This is the gist of the argument. We will now discuss the premises.

The argument begins with the existence of the universe or with self-consciousness. It is self-refuting to doubt one's own existence, since a person must first exist before he can deny his own existence. One who does not exist cannot affirm the proposition, "I do not

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<sup>3</sup> To begin with self-consciousness is to begin with the proposition, "I exist."

exist." Also, a person who denies his own existence withdraws from the debate, and therefore poses no threat to the cosmological argument.

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

Although an infinite progression of causes is possible, an infinite regression of causes is not. An infinite progression can occur since causes can continue to lead to new effects without contradiction, and it is logically possible that this process will never end. However, if we were to assume an infinite regression of causes, then it would be impossible for us to have reached the present, since it is impossible to travel across an actual infinite. Just as it is impossible to reach the end of an infinite progression, our present is an "end" as seen from the past. Any particular moment is an "end" or stopping point as seen from the past, so that if the past is infinite, we could never have reached the present; otherwise, the past would not be infinite, but finite.

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

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

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) is best known for his "Five Ways" of demonstrating the existence of God.<sup>4</sup> Here we will reproduce the second and third from his *Summa Theologica*:

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to

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<sup>4</sup> Modern proponents of cosmological arguments include Norman Geisler and William Lane Craig.

itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or one only. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence – which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.<sup>5</sup>

Some people assert that an uncaused or eternal universe is possible based on quantum theory, but their arguments at best only push the question one step backward so that the existence of the universe still requires an explanation, or a cause. They fail to show that the universe is uncaused or eternal, or that something can come out of nothing. Besides, there are strong disagreements among scientists as to the implications of quantum theory, and arguments of this sort often misapply scientific speculations. In addition, since science itself has no rational contact with reality at all, it does not matter whether or not quantum theory is properly applied, because all of it is false in the first place.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*; P. 1, Q. 2, A. 3. Translation by Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

If the immediate cause of the universe itself requires a cause, then we still have not arrived at the first cause. There must be a cause to explain every cause that is also an effect, but infinite regress is impossible, so there must be an uncaused first cause that is eternal, that has always existed. Since no effect can be uncaused, this first cause has no beginning, and is thus not an effect. Therefore, the argument is invulnerable to the challenge, "If everything has a cause, then God must also have a cause." The objection betrays a lack of attentiveness, since the argument states only that every effect, or everything that comes into being, must have a cause. It shows that God is not an effect, but is the uncaused first cause.

THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT may also be called the argument from design. It is historically associated with the work of William Paley,<sup>6</sup> who argued as follows:

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

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

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

Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and

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<sup>6</sup> Modern proponents of design arguments include Michael Behe and William Dembski.

that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art, in the complexity, subtlety, and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible do they go beyond them in number and variety; yet in a multitude of cases, are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end, or suited to their office, than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity...<sup>7</sup>

The claim is that both ordinary observations and scientific studies indicate that the physical universe exhibits an intricate structure and complex order; it presents itself as a product of deliberate design. Many aspects of the universe seem to be fine-tuned to permit the existence of life. A large number of exact conditions must be simultaneously present. If these factors were to be slightly different than what they are, life would be impossible.

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

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

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

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

THE MORAL ARGUMENT argues from objective moral laws to a giver of moral laws. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) writes in his *Critique of Practical Reason*:<sup>8</sup>

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology* (1802), as cited in *The Existence of God*, edited by John Hick; New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1964; p. 99-103.

<sup>8</sup> In more recent times, Kant's effort was emulated by C. S. Lewis, albeit with a different formulation and agenda.

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*; New York: Macmillan, 1956; p. 166.

To make sense of objective moral laws there must be justice. Since we observe that justice is often not served in this life, there must be an afterlife where exact justice is rendered. Moreover, for there to be justice there must be a Judge who will deliver justice. But for this Judge to judge rightly, he must be omniscient, knowing every thought and deed. And to execute justice, the Judge must be omnipotent.

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

By a postulate of pure practical reason, I understand a theoretical proposition which is not as such demonstrable, but which is an inseparable corollary of an *a priori* unconditionally valid practical law.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, if a person denies that there is an afterlife in which everyone must face this all-knowing and all-powerful Judge, he can no longer account for object morality. Yet men everywhere speak and behave as though there is objective morality. Even those who deny objective morality react as if such a thing exists, especially when their own standard is offended, or when their own welfare is threatened. A person cannot affirm objective morality, either by word or action, and reject its necessary precondition. Hastings Rashdall writes:

The belief in God...is the logical presupposition of an "objective" or absolute Morality. A moral ideal can exist nowhere and nohow but in a mind; an absolute ideal can exist only in a Mind from which all Reality is derived. Our moral ideal can only claim objective reality in so far as it can rationally be regarded as the revelation of a moral ideal eternally existing in the mind of God.<sup>11</sup>

Concluding our discussion of the classical arguments, we will now examine the biblical arguments, so called because of their dependence on the Bible's own content and apologetic strategy.

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

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

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>11</sup> Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*; Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1907; II, p. 212.

concepts, perform certain actions, etc.), but where it is left open at this stage exactly what is substituted for X.<sup>12</sup>

One aspect of the biblical system of apologetics involves arguing that given any Y, the necessary precondition X is the biblical worldview.

For example, science assumes the uniformity of nature (Y), but it cannot prove this principle – it is irrationally assumed. The biblical worldview (X) is the necessary precondition to render this assumption intelligible.<sup>13</sup> Now, the biblical worldview in fact denies the uniformity of nature, but it affirms the doctrine of ordinary providence. That is, it is God who controls the world, and he does it in a regular manner, although he is free to deviate from his usual practice whenever he wishes. In any case, since the biblical worldview is the necessary precondition for the assumption of any regularity in the world, it is a necessary presupposition that makes science intelligible. This does not mean that science is rational or that its theories and conclusions are true, but it means that no one can even make sense of science unless biblical principles are presupposed. The implication is that science can never disprove the Scripture or even argue against it.

Biblical revelation generates a particular type of transcendental argument that is irrefutable, since in the process of argumentation it shows that the biblical worldview (X) is applicable to any Y at all. Whatever is asserted as true or intelligible in the context of debate, the biblical worldview is its necessary precondition. This is true even concerning arguments against Christianity – without the biblical worldview as the presupposition, no objection against Christianity is even intelligible.<sup>14</sup> This is because any argument, whatever it is supposed to prove, is necessarily preceded by principles on epistemology, metaphysics, logic, linguistics, and so on – things that make the argument possible or intelligible in the first place. And we can argue that only the Bible supplies these necessary principles. But once the Bible is acknowledged as true, then of course no objection against it can be true.

The transcendental move in biblical apologetics is, strictly speaking, more of a strategy or method than an argument. Although it is popularly credited to Cornelius Van Til and Greg Bahnsen, their attempt is a complete failure. Even as they claim to defend the Christian faith, they attempt to protect many non-Christian principles, and their method is to place them on a Christian foundation so that they can "account for" them. Thus they make God and Scripture accomplices to falsehood, and merge Christ and Satan in an unholy matrimony. They, along with their followers, have even turned the argument against the Christian faith by insisting that some non-Christian presuppositions, including the reliability of sensation, provide the necessary precondition for our knowledge of the

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Stern, *Transcendental Arguments and Scepticism*; New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2000; p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions*.

<sup>14</sup> For an example, see Vincent Cheung, *The Light of Our Minds*, "The Problem of Evil." See also Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions and Presuppositional Confrontations*.



Scripture.<sup>15</sup> This syncretistic system amounts to an attack on the Christian faith by forcing together Christian and non-Christian principles, often in favor of the latter.

Moreover, it is arguable that they have produced only hints and suggestions of the application of the transcendental method, and certainly nothing close to a sufficient demonstration. On the other hand, Gordon H. Clark has performed this task with admirable success and thoroughness: "The problems of history, politics, and ethics, so it has been argued, require for their solution certain theistic presuppositions....Apparently the best general procedure for one who wishes to recommend Christian theism is to show that other forms of theism are inconsistent mixtures. If some of their propositions should be carried to their logical conclusions, naturalism and eventually skepticism would result; whereas if justice is to be done to possible interpretations of other of their assertions, Christianity would have to be assumed."<sup>16</sup>

THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL ARGUMENT is a positive direct method to advance the truth and necessity of the Christian faith. It is in essence a form of dogmatism.

The word "dogmatic" carries unfavorable connotations in colloquial speech. One dictionary defines "dogmatism" as "positiveness in assertion of opinion especially when unwarranted or arrogant; a viewpoint or system of ideas based on insufficiently examined premises," and a "dogma" is "a point of view or tenet put forth as authoritative without adequate grounds."<sup>17</sup> Although these definitions reflect popular non-academic usage, we mean something very different.

"Dogmatic" can simply mean "doctrinal"<sup>18</sup> or "based on *a priori* principles, not on induction."<sup>19</sup> Both of these definitions are applicable in our context. The synonyms of this word include, "dictatorial, authoritative, magisterial," and in another sense, "deductive, a priori, deducible, derivable, and reasoned."<sup>20</sup> The Christian Bible is a revelation from God, and since God speaks by an absolute and "dictatorial"<sup>21</sup> authority, his revelation is the precondition of all of thought and life, and knowledge comes from valid deductions from it.

In *God and Reason*, Ed. L. Miller explains the meaning of dogmatism as a philosophical position:

One of the distinctive features of the Judeo-Christian tradition is its belief in a divine self-disclosure: God has intervened in human history and spoken; he has unveiled himself in a "special

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<sup>15</sup> I have refuted this in *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, and Captive to Reason*.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *The Christian View of Men and Things* (Trinity Foundation, 1998), p. 155.

<sup>17</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*; Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2001.

<sup>18</sup> *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition*; IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 2000.

<sup>19</sup> *The Oxford American Dictionary of Current English*; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus*. The term "dogmatic theology" is the general equivalent of "systematic theology" in theological usage.

<sup>21</sup> As in, "imposing one's will or opinions on others"; *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.

revelation." And the knowledge of God drawn from this revelation is an example of revealed theology. Such theology is sometimes called "dogmatic" (in the best sense of the word) or "confessional" theology because it seeks to elucidate the divinely bestowed articles of faith (dogmas) that it takes as its fundamental and nonnegotiable data. Not unlike the mathematician, the dogmatic theologian begins with certain givens, though in this case *revealed* givens; the system is bounded by revelation, self-contained, and offered as a package deal.<sup>22</sup>

The Christian system takes biblical revelation as its self-authenticating first principle. By self-authenticating, we are not referring to whether the Bible verifies itself in our experience. It may very well be consistent with our experience, but if we regard the Bible as true because it is consistent with our experience, or because it is consistent with our interpretation of our experience, then it would not be *self*-authenticating. Rather, our experience, or the standard or principle by which we interpret our experience, would be the true first principle. We are not even referring to the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit that the Bible is a revelation from God, although this indeed happens to those who have been chosen for salvation. Rather, by self-authenticating, we mean that the Bible verifies and supports itself by the excellence and sufficiency of its own content, and that it has no need to depend on premises external to itself.

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

The method is similar to rationalism, but there are importance differences. Although the use of deduction in non-Christian rationalism makes it superior to non-Christian philosophies that favor induction, sensation, and experimentation, it fails like the others because its first principles are arbitrary and unjustified. On the other hand, the Bible possesses the content to justify itself as the infallible first principle of the Christian faith.

In any case, dogmatism is perhaps a better name than bare rationalism, since it more readily conveys the idea that the biblical worldview consists of, in the words of Miller, self-contained revealed givens offered as a package deal. Alternatively, we may add the needed qualification and call the method biblical rationalism, biblical foundationalism, or biblical presuppositionalism, as long as it is clear that biblical presuppositionalism is not the pseudo-presuppositionalism of Van Til and Bahnsen. Their method may also be called syncretic presuppositionalism, since contrary to their claim, it presses the synthesis between Christian and non-Christian thought, and offers non-Christian principles the priority.

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<sup>22</sup> Ed. L. Miller, *God and Reason, Second Edition*; New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972, 1995; p. 9.

Every person has a worldview. A worldview consists of a network of interrelated propositions the sum of which forms "a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world."<sup>23</sup> A given worldview may be called a "religion" or a "philosophy" because of its specific content, but it is nevertheless a worldview. By worldview, we refer to any religion, philosophy, or system of thought.

Every worldview has a starting point or first principle from which the rest of the system is derived. Some people claim that a worldview can be a web of mutually dependent propositions without a first principle. However, even if a million liars vouch for one another, all of them are still liars. At least one reliable man would have to vouch for them. But if all of them are liars, a reliable man would not vouch for them, and their credibility falls apart. Likewise, a web of propositions would still need a first principle that supports them all. A true first principle would not produce a web of false propositions, and a web of false propositions would not be supported by a true first principle. Therefore, the first principle remains the crucial issue.

In a web of propositions, some propositions are more central to the web, the destruction of which would also annihilate the propositions that are more remote. But even the most central claims require justification, and a worldview in which the propositions depend on one another in a way that lacks a first principle is in the final analysis exposed as having no justification at all. The claim that a worldview can be a web of mutually dependent propositions without the need of a first principle is really an attempt at hiding the fact that all of the propositions in such a web lack justification.

Therefore, it remains that every worldview requires a first principle or ultimate authority. Being first or ultimate, such a principle cannot be justified by any prior or greater authority; otherwise, it would not be the first or ultimate. This means that the first principle must possess the content to justify itself. For example, the proposition, "All knowledge comes from sense experience," fails to be a first principle on which a worldview can be constructed. This is because if all knowledge comes from sense experience, then this proposed first principle must also be known only by sense experience, but the reliability of sense experience has not been established. Thus the principle generates a vicious circle and self-destructs. It does not matter what can be validly deduced from such a principle – if the system cannot even begin, what follows from the principle is without justification.

It is also impossible to begin a worldview with a self-contradictory first principle. This is because contradictions are unintelligible and meaningless. The law of contradiction states that "A is not non-A," or that something cannot be true and not true at the same time and in the same sense. One must assume this law even in the attempt to reject it; otherwise, he cannot even distinguish between accepting and rejecting this law. But once he assumes it, he can no longer reject it, since he has already assumed it. If we say that truth can be

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<sup>23</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*; Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2001; "weltanschauung." *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, Second Edition*: "A worldview constitutes an overall perspective on life that sums up what we know about the world"; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001; "Wilhelm Dilthey," p. 236.

contradictory, then we can also say that truth cannot be contradictory, since we have abandoned the distinction between can and cannot. If we do not affirm the law of contradiction, then dogs are cats, elephants are rats, "See Jane run" can mean "I am married," and "I *reject* the law of contradiction" can mean "I *affirm* the law of contradiction," or even "I am a moron." If it is not true that "A is not non-A," anything can mean anything and nothing at the same time, and nothing is intelligible.

Since no legitimate first principle can be self-contradictory, skepticism is impossible, because it is self-contradictory. When used in the philosophical sense, a "skeptic" refers to one who maintains that "no knowledge is possible...or that there is not sufficient or adequate evidence to tell if any knowledge is possible."<sup>24</sup> Both of these expressions of skepticism are self-contradictory – one claims to *know* that one can know nothing, and the other claims to *know* that there is inadequate evidence to know anything. If a person claims that one cannot know whether one can know anything, then he is still claiming to *know* that one cannot know whether one can know anything, and so he contradicts himself.

Self-contradictory first principles are untenable. Skepticism is self-contradictory, and thus untenable. This means that an adequate first principle must guarantee the possibility of knowledge.

In addition to making knowledge possible, a first principle must also yield an adequate amount of knowledge. To illustrate, "My name is Vincent," may be a true statement, but it does not tell me anything about the origin of the universe, or whether stealing is immoral. It does not even give me the concept of "origin" or "morality." Moreover, although it may be a true statement, how do I know that it is true in the first place? The proposition, "My name is Vincent," does not prove that my name is really Vincent; it does not justify itself. A first principle is inadequate if it fails to provide information concerning epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics, and if it fails to justify itself.

For at least the above reasons, a first principle cannot be based on induction, in which the premises do not inevitably lead to the conclusion, such as reasoning from particulars to universals. For example, no amount of empirical investigation can justify the proposition, "Every human being has a brain." To establish a general proposition like this by empirical means, a person must examine every human being who has ever lived, who is now living, and since this is a proposition about human beings, he must also examine every human being who will live in the future. Also, while he is examining the human beings in one part of the world, he must somehow ensure that the nature of man has not changed in those parts of the world whose human beings he has already studied.

In addition, how does he prove that he knows a given human being has a brain just because he thinks he is looking at it? He must provide justification for the claim that he knows that something is there just because he thinks he is looking at it. But it would be viciously circular to say that he knows that something is there just because he thinks he is looking at it, because what he thinks he is looking at is really there, and he knows that it

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<sup>24</sup> *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, "Skeptics," p. 850.

is really there because he thinks he is looking at it. Adding to the now already impossible situation, to prove this general proposition about human beings by sensation and induction, he must also examine his own brain.

On the basis of induction, it would be impossible to define a human being in the first place, since the concept of a human being is also a universal. In fact, on the basis of induction, one can never establish any proposition, let alone a universal proposition like, "All men are mortal."

Some people try to rescue induction by saying that, although it cannot conclusively establish any proposition, at least it can establish a proposition as probable. But this is both misleading and false. Probability refers to "the ratio of the number of outcomes in an exhaustive set of equally likely outcomes that produce a given event to the total number of possible outcomes."<sup>25</sup> Even if we grant that empirical and inductive methods can discover the numerator of the fraction (although I deny that they can do even this), to determine the denominator requires knowledge of a universal, and omniscience is often necessary to establish this.

Since probability consists of a numerator and a denominator, since the denominator is a universal, and since empirical and inductive methods cannot know universals, then to say that induction can arrive at "probable" knowledge is nonsense. Even apart from other insoluble problems inherent in empiricism itself, an epistemology that is based on an empirical principle cannot succeed, since empiricism necessarily depends on induction, and induction is always a formal fallacy.

On the other hand, deduction produces conclusions that are guaranteed to be true if the premises are true and if the process of reasoning is valid. Although rationalism is less popular, it is a tremendous improvement over empiricism because it reasons using deduction instead of using empirical and inductive methods. But still, non-Christian rationalism cannot succeed in establishing a true and coherent worldview, and we will briefly examine some of its problems.

Rationalism selects a first principle (or as in geometry, begins with one or more axioms) and deduces the rest of the system from it. If the first principle is true and the process of deductive reasoning is valid, then the subsidiary propositions or theorems would all be true by necessity.

A main problem with non-revelational rationalism has to do with how it selects a first principle.<sup>26</sup> If the first principle is self-contradictory, then of course it must be rejected. But even if the principle is not self-contradictory, it must also be self-justifying to avoid the charge of being arbitrary. Although I would say that only the biblical first principle is

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<sup>25</sup> *Merriam-Webster*, "probability."

<sup>26</sup> Some people defines rationalism as an approach that rejects all supernatural revelation from the start, and this is indeed true of some rationalistic systems. But as an approach to knowledge, rationalism does not include an inherent rejection of revelation; rather, whether it accepts or rejects revelation depends on the first principle selected for a particular system.

self-justifying, even if a non-biblical first principle is self-consistent and self-justifying, it must be broad enough to make knowledge possible. It must contain enough content so that one may deduce an adequate worldview from it. Thus to posit the proposition, "My name is Vincent," as the first principle in a rationalistic worldview would result in the failures mentioned earlier.

Still another problem with non-revelational rationalism is that there are various schools of rationalistic systems, and their starting points are all different and incompatible. Which one is correct? A rationalistic worldview with an arbitrary first principle cannot succeed. Although the deductive rationalistic approach is far superior to the inductive empirical approach, it also results in failure. Since any time a person uses either approach, he inevitably introduces the problems of that approach into his worldview, a mixture of rationalism and empiricism would only combine the fatal flaws of both methods.

Then, the propositions within a worldview must not contradict one another. For example, the first principle of a worldview must not produce a proposition in ethics that contradicts another proposition in metaphysics, or politics, or economics.

By this point, having examined the conditions for an adequate first principle, the problems of empiricism and induction, and the problems of non-biblical rationalism, we have already effectively destroyed all existing and possible non-Christian systems. They simply cannot satisfy all the requirements that we have listed. This includes Islam, Mormonism, and other non-Christian religions that claim to be founded on revelation, since upon examination, one will see that their alleged revelations cannot meet the conditions.

Our strategy for biblical apologetics begins with the recognition that Christianity is the only deductive system with a self-consistent and self-justifying first principle that has been infallibly revealed by an all-powerful and all-knowing God, and that is broad enough to yield a sufficient number of propositions to construct a comprehensive and coherent worldview. Christianity is the only true worldview, and it alone makes knowledge possible. All other systems of thought collapse into skepticism, but since skepticism is self-contradictory, one cannot remain in such a position, and Christianity is the only way out of the epistemological abyss.

The classical arguments for the existence of God do not provide positive support for the entire biblical worldview. Even if they are successful, they argue for the truth of only several biblical propositions, such as God as the creator, God as the designer, and God as the legislator. On the other hand, Christian rationalism simultaneously advances all biblical propositions and all their logical implications. If the entire Bible is true, then of course God exists – he is as the Bible describes him, and all other ideas of deity are excluded.

A more serious defect of the classical arguments is their dependence on sensation, induction, and science. Since these methods of discovery are irrational, an argument must fail if it relies on any of them at any point, even if it arrives at a conclusion that resembles

the truth, such as the existence of a supreme being. That is, scientific reasoning may show that it is more rational to affirm rather than to deny the existence of God. However, since scientific reasoning itself is fallacious, we must reject scientific reasoning even though we affirm the existence of God. In other words, we must not affirm the existence of God on the basis of scientific reasoning.

The classical arguments might remain useful as a type of *ad hominem* arguments. This is not the fallacy of irrelevant personal attack, but the method of turning the opponent's premises against his own position. So the Christian, for the sake of argument, temporarily assumes the non-Christian's false premises, such as the reliability of sensation, the validity of induction, and the rationality of science. Then, from these premises, the Christian reasons to either absurd conclusions, thus demonstrating the foolishness of the non-Christian's premises, or he reasons to conclusions favorable to the Christian faith, such as the existence of God, the historical reliability of the Bible, the resurrection of Christ, and the superiority of biblical ethics.

In this negative sense, the classical arguments demonstrate the rational superiority of the Christian faith even when false premises such as the reliability of sensation and science are assumed.<sup>27</sup> Since these arguments rest on an irrational foundation, they are not positive proofs of anything. It is impossible to reach a right knowledge of God by piling up classical arguments. Rather, if they are used at all, their function is destructive – they defeat the non-Christian on his own territory, showing that he is wrong even by his own standard. An infallible argument for the Christian faith requires the infallible revelation of God as its foundation.

Proverbs 26:4-5 offers two principles that summarize the biblical approach to apologetics:

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

"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1). The Bible is aware that there are those who deny God, and it says that they are stupid people. The non-Christian is a fool. He trusts in false principles and assumptions, such as the reliability of sensation, the validity of induction, the rationality of science and experimentation, the arbitrary axioms of non-biblical rationalism, and the texts of non-biblical religions. The non-Christian trusts in these things because he is stupid. They lead him to arrive at false conclusions and to defend these conclusions. He thinks that his inferior intelligence and methodology can discover the truth about reality. He thinks that he does not need God to teach him.

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<sup>27</sup> Since science is constantly changing, modern versions of the classical arguments are probably more useful against contemporary opponents, whereas the presuppositional argument requires no revision. It is often said that science has been and will continue to be progressive. This is a tacit admission that science has never been right and that it will never be right. The Bible has been correct in all that it affirms since it was first written. It needs no change or progress.

Verse 4 says that the Christian should not think like the non-Christian, in order to avoid becoming a stupid person. Cornelius Van Til, Greg Bahnsen, and their followers commit this very error. They claim that their philosophy presupposes God as the precondition of intelligibility to all things, and that it presses the antithesis between Christian and non-Christian thought. This is a lie, because then they insist with great vehemence that non-Christian principles such as the reliability of sensation, induction, and science are consistent with biblical principles.

Rather than rejecting these false principles, they embrace them. According to them, the difference is that the non-Christian cannot "account for" these principles, but the Christian can do so on the basis of biblical presuppositions. But since these non-Christian principles are inherently irrational and false, this means that they force biblical presuppositions to "account for," in a sense that approves of and thus validates, false principles and propositions. When they are challenged on this, some of them would even state that these non-Christian principles constitute the precondition for knowing the biblical principles. For example, the reliability of sensation has become for them the precondition for the knowledge of revelation.

Therefore, contrary to their claim, the first principle and the ultimate authority of their worldview is not divine revelation, but human sensation. Thus their philosophy is that non-Christian presuppositions provide the precondition of intelligibility to Christian principles. This is the opposite of what they claim for their method. Since this amounts to an attack against the Christian faith, either they were never interested in defending it in the first place, or in answering the fool according to his folly, they have committed themselves to the fool's premises, and they have become like him. They have become stupid people.

As long as the classical arguments are regarded as positive proofs, as if they can in fact demonstrate the truth, rather than as only destructive or *ad hominem* arguments, then their use also commits this error. Both classical apologetics and pseudo-presuppositional apologetics fail in that they assume non-Christian principles, not only for the sake of argument in order to refute them, but as true principles in order to prove the Christian faith or to promote a synthesis between biblical and non-biblical thought.

But we can avoid this. We do not have to answer the non-Christian in accordance with his principles. We can refuse to accept the premises of a fool, and we can refuse to reason like a stupid person. Instead, from the infallible foundation of God's revelation, we can deduce an infallible and comprehensive system of knowledge. This is the positive aspect of biblical philosophy and apologetics.

Nevertheless, without becoming like the fool, we can assume his premises to see where they lead.<sup>28</sup> This is different from classical apologetics and pseudo-presuppositionalism. Practitioners of classical apologetics embrace the non-biblical premises as true and argue on that basis. Practitioners of pseudo-presuppositionalism pretend to adopt revelation as

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<sup>28</sup> As Paul says, "I am speaking as a fool" (2 Corinthians 11:21).



their first principle, but in reality they embrace non-biblical presuppositions just as tenaciously as non-Christians do, claiming that revelation "accounts for" them – that is, they make sense of, validates, and justifies them. They even make some of these false principles, including the reliability of sensation, the precondition for the knowledge of revelation. They claim to "press the antithesis," but in reality they press a synthesis between biblical and non-biblical principles, between truth and falsehood, Christ and Satan. In contrast, we take up the non-Christian's premises only in a temporary manner, and it is done only for the sake of argument, with the express intention to refute all of them.

We contend that science is irrational, so that it fails as a means to discover the truth about reality, but then we can also show that scientific reasoning favors the Christian faith more than any other worldview, and that it inflicts damage upon non-Christian beliefs and values. We can formulate historical arguments against the non-Christian, while knowing that his method of historical investigation prevents any knowledge of history in the first place. This is the negative aspect of biblical apologetics, and it can accommodate empirical and scientific arguments. Again, these arguments cannot demonstrate the positive truth about anything, but they can show that the non-Christians assume premises that work against themselves.

This dual strategy works against all non-Christian worldviews, including non-biblical religions. It makes little difference whether the non-Christian worldview is atheism, agnosticism, communism, nihilism, Buddhism, Mormonism, Islam, or any other system of thought. The method is the same. Since the Bible is true, and since it condemns all other religions, then all non-biblical religions are declared false by the same infallible authority that declares the Bible to be true. Anyone who challenges this must disprove the Bible, at which point the Christian may employ the transcendental and presuppositional arguments to defend his faith and to destroy the non-Christian's position.

We can demonstrate that the non-Christian religion is self-contradictory. Or, we can show that it cannot accommodate some of the ethical values that he treasures, but that they can exist in a coherent manner only in the biblical worldview. For example, Buddhism asserts certain ethical principles, but it lacks any rational and authoritative foundation to support them. They exist in an arbitrary manner in that worldview. Then, if a non-Christian religion affirms a secular method of historical investigation, we can use it to come up with findings that expose the historical errors of this religion. If a religion accepts the scientific method, then we can use the scientific method to refute it. Again, science commits the triple fallacy of empiricism, induction, and experimentation, that is, the fallacy of affirming the consequent. So science can prove nothing. But we can assume it for the sake of argument to refute a system of thought that accepts science as reliable.

The Christian uses both positive and negative argumentation to defend his faith, and to confound the non-Christian. Paul writes:

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We

demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

Every Christian has a duty to defend his faith and to destroy the non-Christian's beliefs. As Peter writes, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). And Jude says, "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." The biblical strategy, with the presuppositional argument as the central thrust, equips the Christian to "demolish arguments" and "take captive every thought" even when confronting the most crafty and hostile enemies.

How should we regard the non-Christian? Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Of course, the Bible would not call a person foolish for rejecting Zeus, Allah, Buddha, and other false gods and religions, since the Bible itself rejects them. The word "God" here is used in a specific sense, as referring only to the God that the Bible teaches. A person is stupid if he rejects *this* God. Anyone is stupid if he rejects the Christian God, or God as the Bible describes him. Whether or not they are religious, all non-Christians by definition reject the Christian God. Therefore, the biblical teaching is that all non-Christians are stupid.

Romans 1:22-25 confirms this: "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles....They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator...." Thus the Bible calls all non-Christians stupid, whether they are atheists, agnostics, Buddhists, Catholics, or Muslims. Psalm 53:2 suggests that anyone who does not seek God lacks understanding: "God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God." Again, the Bible recognizes only one God as true, and so to seek after some kind of God, or some general deity or religion, does not count. Unless a person seeks the Christian God – unless a person believes in the Christian faith – he has no understanding. Verse 4 says that the "workers of iniquity" have "no knowledge" (KJV). Non-Christians are stupid and ignorant.

On the other hand, Scripture teaches, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (Psalm 111:10). Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Thus Christians have wisdom and understanding. They are intelligent people. But since the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and the Bible acknowledges only the Christian God, this means that non-Christians have not even started to have wisdom. They do not have even a little of it. They are completely unintelligent and uneducated.

The Bible says that it is because of their "wickedness" that non-Christians "suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18) about the existence and the attributes of God, even though he has put into their minds an inescapable revelation about himself, and even though the created

world and the revealed word testify about him. Paul writes, "They know about God, but they don't honor him or even thank him. Their thoughts are useless, and their stupid minds are in the dark. They claim to be wise, but they are fools" (Romans 1:21-22, CEV). Read it again: "Their stupid minds are in the dark." This is what the Bible says, and what God thinks, about non-Christians, about those who do not believe in him, and who do not honor him, thank him, and worship him. All Christians are obligated to have this opinion of non-Christians. Either we think that all non-Christians are stupid and in the dark, or we call God a liar.

The biblical assessment of non-Christians is that they are both stupid and sinful. They are intellectually and ethically inferior. They demonstrate their lack of intellectual aptitude in failing to agree with the Christian faith. And in denying the Christian faith despite the innate knowledge that God has placed in their minds and despite the irrefutable arguments of biblical apologetics, they show that they are not only intellectual ostriches but that they actively suppress the truth about God. This is wickedness at its worst. Paul writes, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Romans 1:18).

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

The Bible describes non-Christians as contemptible, entirely useless and pathetic. We were also in such a condition. If left to ourselves, we would have remained in ignorance and wickedness. It was only by God's grace in choosing us to hear and to believe the gospel that we were enlightened to the truth, and brought to faith in Jesus Christ. Now we are no longer spiritual rubbish, but useful citizens of God's kingdom. Therefore, when we say that non-Christians are fools, we do not mean that we have always been wise, or that we were any better in ourselves, but it is only by God's sovereign election that we have been saved from a state of stupidity and futility. We did not become Christians because we had the wisdom to know truth by our own ability, but we were given this wisdom because God chose us to become Christians, to be rescued from sin and hellfire through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Knowing this, there is no room for arrogance, but we are grateful to God for our salvation, and we labor so that others may be saved as well.

In any case, it remains that the Bible characterizes all non-Christians as stupid and sinful. Thus Christians must regard non-Christians as intellectually and ethically inferior. Of course non-Christians may think that this is an unkind and offensive assessment, but Christians must not think like them. Since the Bible teaches that non-Christians are stupid and sinful, and to be a Christian is to believe the Bible, then to be a Christian is to believe that all non-Christians are stupid and sinful. Therefore, unless we are ready to renounce

God and the Scripture, we must say with Anselm, "Why then did 'the Fool say in his heart, there is no God'...unless because he was stupid and a fool?"

### **THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD**

The divine attributes are God's characteristics, the sum of which constitutes the definition of who he is. The KNOWABILITY of God is the first issue. Since God is infinitely greater than human beings, the question arises as to whether we can understand him. We answer that because God made man according to the divine image, then no matter the difference between God and man, there is a point of contact between them so that communication is possible. The fact that God has chosen to speak to us through the Bible means that human language is sufficient, and so it is possible to obtain reliable and detailed information about God from his verbal revelation.

It is self-refuting to argue that man cannot know God due to the difference between the two, because the statement itself assumes considerable knowledge about God. A person who says that God is unknowable is asserting a piece of information about the very essence of God. But if God is indeed unknowable, then no one can know that he is unknowable. The fact that we have the idea of God in our minds and that we can debate the question demonstrate that God must be knowable.

It is likewise self-refuting to say that human language is insufficient to communicate information about the things of God, because the statement itself communicates a piece of information about the things of God. This piece of information is that the things of God are such that human language cannot adequately describe them or refer to them. But since this piece of information itself describes and refers to the very essence of the things of God, it refutes itself.

Language is always adequate. To illustrate, we can use "X" to designate any idea or combination of ideas, and it will always be adequate, since words are only arbitrary symbols that can refer to anything. The question is whether human beings have the ability to think about God, not whether words are adequate to talk about him. And God has made human beings in his own image, they can indeed think about God, talk about God, and understand God.

The Bible teaches that God has revealed himself through the words of Scripture. Nothing more is needed to settle the issue. It establishes that God is knowable and that human language is sufficient. God is able to tell us about himself, and we are able to understand what he tells us.

Having determined that God is knowable, the next question concerns how much we can know about him. Since God has revealed all that is in the Bible, and since at least in principle it is possible to understand all of the Bible and all its logical implications, this represents the minimum of what we can know about God in this life. If we add to this the fact that we will endlessly learn more and more about God after this life, the extent of the knowledge of God possible to us is, to put it mildly, considerable. In fact, since it is unlikely that anyone will learn all of the Bible and all of its implications in his lifetime, if

for no other reason than that the human life span is rather short, we are rightly suspicious of those theologians who seem so obsessed with imposing limitations on the knowledge of God on the rest of us.

The Bible indeed teaches the INCOMPREHENSIBILITY of God, but not in the sense asserted by most theologians. Psalm 145:3 says that "no one can fathom" his greatness, and the apostle Paul writes in Romans 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" It is noteworthy that the statement by Paul is made after he has clearly and definitely answered every question he has raised about God, man, and the plan of salvation to that point in the letter to the Romans. God is incomprehensible only in the sense that there is always more to know, and not that we cannot know. Still more ridiculous is the usual view that we cannot even know or understand that which he has plainly revealed in the Bible.

God is infinite and we are finite; therefore, we can never know everything about God. But just because we cannot know everything about God does not mean that we cannot know anything about him, and to know him in an accurate and definite manner. In our context, to "comprehend" means to have an exhaustive understanding, so that there remains nothing more to know. In this sense, it is impossible for finite beings to comprehend an infinite being. No matter how much about God we come to know, there will always be more about him to know.

Since God is infinite, it is possible to make an infinite number of true propositions about him. On the other hand, we are finite, and we can process only a limited number of propositions at any time. Therefore, it would be impossible for us to know an infinite number of propositions, since there will always be more to know. This limitation will remain even after the resurrection of believers. Although our intellectual capabilities will be vastly enhanced, we will remain finite, and therefore God will remain inexhaustible to us.

That said, it remains that we can know much about God. We can know and understand all that the Bible asserts and implies about him. Jeremiah 9:24 says that a person can know and understand God's very character, that he is one "who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth." The doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God does not nullify the possibility of true and abundant knowledge about him by finite human beings. Rather, the more we think about his incomprehensibility, the more we are reminded of the abundance of information that he has already revealed to us in the Bible, and how even that source of information will not be exhausted in this life.

Thus although we acknowledge God's incomprehensibility as a corollary to his greatness and immensity, it is not something that imposes any real limitation upon us. There is certainly an ontological difference between a library with too many books to read in a person's lifetime and a library with an infinite number of books, but there is no practical difference. To say that the library is mysterious or that we cannot understand any of the

books in the library because it has an infinite number of books, therefore, is just wrong and stupid.

What about the argument that each book in the library is too profound to understand? This represents the view that not only is revelation so extensive that there is no way to make contact with all of it, but we cannot even understand what we do have contact with. The simple answer is that theologians have no right to speak for us. If they insist that they are too stupid to understand any part of the Bible, then that is their problem, but unless there is a biblical basis – a biblical basis that they can understand? – they cannot impose this limitation on the rest of humanity.

Since the Bible itself does not teach the view that all of its doctrines or propositions are too profound for finite minds to understand, it is merely a human invention to flaunt one's false humility or to excuse himself from affirming what is plainly written. And since this represents the traditional doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God, we must denounce it as a false and damnable doctrine. It dishonors God and deceives his people. Instead, we say that God speaks to us in the Bible, and he speaks in a way that we can understand. If we had the time, the diligence, and the grace, in principle we could learn all of it. This is the only view that honors God and the Scripture, that liberates the people of God to enjoy and worship him, and it makes clear that the whole world is obligated to believe and obey the book – all of it.

We must overturn any theologian that appeals to God's incomprehensibility in order to negate God's knowability. Although we cannot possess exhaustive knowledge about him, we can indeed possess true knowledge – a whole lot of true knowledge – about him. Whatever God reveals to us in the words of the Bible is true, and we have true knowledge about God to the extent that we know and understand these words.

I may know a person's name or age without knowing anything else about him, but this does not mean that my limited knowledge about him is false. It is true that the more that I know about a person, the better I will understand what I already know about him; however, what I already know about him is nevertheless true. By obtaining additional information about a person, I acquire a richer context from which to understand the backgrounds and implications of what I already know, such as his name or age, but my knowledge about his name or age was true even before I obtained the additional information. Likewise, although we do not have exhaustive knowledge about God, what we know about him from the Bible is nevertheless reliable and accurate, and complete as far as it goes.

Christians who do not grasp certain biblical doctrines sometimes give up by calling them "mysteries," but the knowability of God warns us against doing this. This tendency to label biblical doctrines as mysteries exposes a defect in their mentality. It often stems from a misunderstanding of the nature of revelation, or even a slothful or rebellious attitude toward the Scripture. Perhaps the person indeed understands the doctrine, but he refuses to accept it. Since he cannot deny the biblical basis of the doctrine, he calls it a mystery so that he does not have to affirm it.

For example, many people regard the doctrine of divine election as a mystery. However, since the Bible teaches the doctrine and tells us what to think about it, we should not call it a mystery, but instead a plain doctrine that all Christians must affirm. A doctrine like divine election that has been revealed and explained is not a mystery.<sup>29</sup> Since God has revealed a large amount of information on the topic, it is a clear teaching that demands universal acceptance. A person who closes his eyes to the Bible and insists on calling the doctrine a mystery is in blatant defiance against divine revelation. It is not that he does not understand it, but that he does not want to accept it, but he is too dishonest to admit it and too afraid to tell God to his face.

Refusing to understand or accept anything that the Bible teaches is to insult the God who has given us the priceless gift of revelation. The obsession with the incomprehensibility of God is not a sign of reverence for him, but of unbelief and disobedience. This tendency should not be equated with piety, and should not be encouraged among believers, but it ought to be spurned, rebuked, and destroyed.<sup>30</sup>

We proceed to examine other divine attributes, beginning with those that elaborate on the form of God's existence, or his metaphysical attributes. The NECESSITY of God is one such attribute. It refers to the fact that he exists by logical necessity.

When the Bible talks about "God," it does not refer to some generic deity, but its idea of God is specific and clearly defined. And when a Christian says, "God exists," he should not have in mind a general idea of some supreme being, but he should have in mind the God that the Bible talks about, and he should believe that this God is as the Bible says he is. Otherwise, what he says would not correspond to the Bible on whose basis he makes the statement. Thus Christians should not attempt to defend a general theism, but a definite biblical idea of God.

In fact, there is no such thing as general theism, since any theistic outlook is always tied to a worldview, so that there is Christian theism, Islamic theism, and other varieties. They all disagree on what the "theistic" God is like. Therefore, a person cannot argue for theism alone to make all theistic religions possible, and then proceed to argue for other claims within a particular theistic worldview. Since each worldview has a unique view of God, one must argue for his own view of God (which already means that he must argue for his worldview as a whole), and not a general God that several worldviews can accept, because there is no such thing. Therefore, to establish the existence of the Christian God does not serve Islam or Mormon interests at all. In fact, establishing the existence of the Christian God automatically refutes Islam and Mormonism, since their views of God are incompatible.

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<sup>29</sup> A "mystery" in the Bible does not refer to something that man cannot understand. Rather, it is something that has not been fully told to man before, but that is now more fully told and explained (see Romans 16:25-26, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54, Ephesians 3:4-6, Colossians 1:25-27, 2:2-3). Thus the word has to do with the chronology of God's revelation instead of man's intellectual limitation. In fact, when the Bible calls something a "mystery," it is a sure sign that we have been informed about it and that we can understand it.

<sup>30</sup> See Vincent Cheung, "The Incomprehensibility of God."

God exists in every possible world. A "possible world" is reality as it could be, in which any contingent being or event can be otherwise. For example, it is possible for a given person to be taller than he is, and it is possible for a certain car to be red instead of green. Any reality that does not contain a contradiction is a possible world; that is, possible relative to the imagination (as in what is conceivable in the mind), and not relative to God's decree (as in what God has in fact determined). Since God's decree has determined all things, so that nothing can be different than what has been determined, from this perspective only one reality is possible. In any case, a statement like  $2 + 2 = 4$  is true in every possible world, and  $1 + 1 = 10$  is false in every possible world. To say that God's existence is a logical necessity means that the proposition, "God does not exist" entails a contradiction in this and every other possible reality. This conclusion is the necessary implication of the Bible's description of God's attributes and God's relation to his creation.

Some people maintain that God does not exist by logical necessity, but only by factual necessity in our reality. Since our claim is that he exists by logical necessity in every possible world, we agree that he also exists by factual necessity in this reality. However, given what we know to be true about God, it is inadequate to say that he exists only by factual necessity in this reality, and that he may not exist by logical necessity in other possible worlds. The presuppositional argument and the transcendental argument render any reality inconceivable unless the Christian worldview is presupposed.

God is an uncaused being, and since he is the creator, sustainer, and controller of all things, he existed before all things. He sustains his own being, and he is not dependent on anything. This is the ASEITY of God, sometimes called his SELF-EXISTENCE or INDEPENDENCE. He exists "from himself,"<sup>31</sup> and does not depend on anything outside of himself for his existence. God is self-contained, and exists not by some foreign power, but by his very own nature.

The Bible says that "the Father has life in himself" (John 5:26), but our existence is dependent on the will and power of God: "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Revelation 4:11 says, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." Paul says in Acts 17:25 that God "is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything," but that he is the one who "gives all men life and breath and everything else."

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

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<sup>31</sup> Anselm: "But what are You save that supreme being, existing *through Yourself* alone, who made everything else from nothing?"; *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*; p. 89.



eternity" (93:2). Peter writes, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8).

God's eternal nature implies that all knowledge is an eternal intuition to him. There is a succession of ideas in the mind of man. He reasons from premises to conclusions, a process that occurs in time and as a succession of ideas in the mind. But since God is timeless, no proposition is chronologically considered before another proposition, so that all propositions are before his mind as one eternal intuition or thought. Therefore, God thinks without mental associations or a succession of ideas. He thinks by pure intuition, since all knowledge is simultaneously present before him, including facts that pertain to our future.

This does not mean that logic is inapplicable to God or that logic is different to him. Logic is the same to God as it is to us, but because he is eternal and omniscient, his thinking is not characterized by a succession of ideas. Since all his thoughts are simultaneously present, all premises and conclusions are simultaneously present before his mind. This does not affect the logical relations between these premises and conclusions. He knows these relations, and they are the same to him as they are to us.

When he translates his thoughts into words, as he does in the Bible, the thoughts that are simultaneously present in his mind are arranged into a succession of ideas, in their logical order, and written down. His presentation follows the principles of logic, which proceed from his rational nature. As the Bible says, in the beginning was the Word – that is, *logos*, which means logic, reason, wisdom, and so on – and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Thus this view of logic is not based on speculation, but since the Bible is the word of God, the whole book shows us how God expresses himself in words. Moreover, the Son of God took on human flesh, entered the realm of time, and lived among us. The biblical account of him shows that he articulated his thoughts in intelligible speech, arranged in accordance with the principles of logic. Therefore, although God's thinking does not consist in a succession of ideas, we know that it can accurately translate into propositions and arranged as a succession of ideas, so that even though his thoughts are higher than our thoughts, he can speak to us so that we may think his thoughts.

Some people insist that our mental makeup is so different that logic itself is different with God. They assert that there is "human logic" and there is "God's logic," and the arguments of human logic may not apply to God. But this betrays a misunderstanding of logic. Logic does not consist of arbitrary or invented rules, but of the necessary principles of thought. Its purpose is not only to make communication convenient; rather, if there is any thinking at all, the laws of logic apply by necessity.

Man did not invent logic, but logic came from God, and we have some grasp of logic and perceive its necessity because God thinks in accordance with the principles of logic, and he has made us in his own image. God thinks in accordance with the principles of logic not because he is subservient to a set of rules that are higher than himself; rather, the

principles of logic are descriptions of the way God thinks. They are descriptions of his rational nature.

Thus to say that logic is higher than God would be analogous to saying that omnipotence is higher than God. Or, to say that if God thinks in accordance with logic, then he would be subservient to logic, is analogous to saying that if God were to be omnipotent, then he would be subservient to omnipotence. No, he *is* omnipotence. Omnipotence is his nature; it is not something other than, external to, or contingent to him. The word is a description of his power. Likewise, God *is* logic, truth, wisdom, rationality, and so on. These things are not higher or lower than God – they *are* God. They are descriptions that emphasize the intellectual aspect of the divine nature.

Therefore, there is in fact no such thing as human logic, but God's logic is the only kind of logic, and when we think in accordance with the laws of logic, we imitate the operation of his mind. Besides, to argue that "human logic" does not apply to God is to use human logic to say something about God, which is self-refuting. If human logic is inapplicable to him, then one can never say so and expect to make sense at the same time. Logic is of God, and it is either God's logic, or no logic at all.

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

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

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

God says in Malachi 3:6, "I the LORD do not change." And he says in Isaiah 46:11, "What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do," and Psalm 33:11 says, "the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations." Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" And James writes that God does not "change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). God remains the same not only in his being and character, but all his thoughts and decrees stay the same.

The immutability of God implies the IMPASSIBILITY of God. This means that God is without "passions" – emotions or feelings. Less thoughtful believers protest against the doctrine, since they misapply biblical passages that seem to describe a God who

experiences emotions such as grief, joy, and wrath (Psalm 78:40; Isaiah 62:5; Revelation 19:15).

Passages that appear to ascribe emotions to God are anthropopathisms. Opponents of divine impassibility argue that this is to avoid the obvious teaching of Scripture. It dismisses as anthropopathism what we do not wish to associate with God. However, these same people would agree that those biblical references that ascribe to God bodily parts such as hands and eyes are anthropomorphisms. Those who think that God really has a physical body should not even be considered Christians. Therefore, one must not reject anthropopathism as an explanation without good reason.

Since the Bible teaches that God is spirit and that he has no form (John 4:24 and Deuteronomy 4:12, 15), any passage that speaks about God as if he has a body is obviously figurative. When they are understood this way, both kinds of passages make good sense, whereas to interpret them in the opposite direction would not. That is, if it is thought that God has a physical body, then those passages that say he is spirit and that he has no form would generate confusion, if not outright contradiction. And this problem would arise because they are not supposed to be interpreted this way.

The Bible is consistent in this. When it talks about God's being, it teaches that he is spirit and that he has no form. When it talks about his ability and his work, it sometimes uses anthropomorphisms, so that it refers to his hands, arms, eyes, ears, and so on. The former refers to what he *is*, and the latter refers to what he *does*. The difference is very definite and easy to perceive. In fact, given those passages that tell us about the being of God, it would be heretical to interpret the other passages as teaching that God has a body. Likewise, given what the Bible tells us about the being of God, it would be heretical to say that he has emotions that resemble human feelings and fluctuations.

The view that God experiences emotions like men appear to entail a number of contradictions:

A man may become angry against his will in the sense that he does not choose to become angry, and he does not choose to experience whatever causes the anger, but that the "trigger" incites this emotion in him against his preference. This applies to human experiences of joy, fear, grief, and so on. Although one may develop a remarkable level of self-control by the power of the Scripture and the Holy Spirit, it remains that a person's volition and emotion do not maintain an exact relationship. His emotional state is not always exactly the way he wishes or decides it to be. However, this cannot be true with God even if he were to experience emotions, because such lack of self-control contradicts his omniscience, sovereignty, and immutability.

Since God is omniscient, he cannot be surprised, and this at least eliminates certain ways of experiencing emotions. Suppose I become angry because a man insults me at this very moment. It is unlikely that I would still be angry two thousand years in the future. And if I had known two thousand years in the past that he would insult me today, it is unlikely

that I would become angry by the time he does it. In fact, if I have had two thousand years to consider his insult, by the time he actually does it, I might not react at all.

Perhaps the reply is that all facts are simultaneously present to God, so that the insult that angers him is always happening "now." But this would imply that God must be angry about this one insult throughout eternity, and not just when it happens. If so, then God's emotions would not offer us the kind of interactivity that proponents of divine emotions are after. In any case, suppose something happens that alleviates this anger. Of course, the only way is forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But since God knows Christ's sacrifice just as well as the man's insult, we are at a loss as to whether he is ever angry or not. The mental experiment results in absurdity, because the truth is that God is not like man, because he is not a man.

Then, if an action of mine can cause anger in God in a similar way that I can cause anger in a man, then this means that I can cause anger in God by my power. To the degree that he lacks self-control, he is helpless against my efforts to cause anger in him. Likewise, if an action of mine can produce joy in God in a similar way that I can produce joy in a man, then this means that I have the ability to produce joy in God at will. In this manner, I would exercise a significant measure of control over God. But this contradicts his sovereignty and immutability.

The matter becomes much more complex when we take into account that he knows all the thoughts and actions of his creatures in all of history simultaneously. But it is enough to consider all the billions of people who anger him at any point in time, and the thousands or at least hundreds of people who please him at the same time. How is it possible for him to be angry with two billion people in a sense like man's anger and pleased with two hundred people, also in the human sense, at the same time? If the answer is that God's mind is immense, so that he is not subject to human limitations, then our point is also established. There is no warrant to say that God is extremely similar to man in some ways, as if bound by many of man's limitations, but that he is completely superior to man in other ways, as if he has none of man's limitations.

Therefore, some form of divine impassibility is necessary. If God is angered by our sins, it is only because he wills to be angered by them, and not because his mental state is subject to our will or beyond his control. Even if God has emotions, they are under his control, and they will never compromise his divine attributes. And since they cannot compromise the divine attributes, this also means that even if he has emotions, he does not have them in a way that is similar to man. But then we wonder why we would still call them emotions. Thus at least in this sense and to this extent, we must affirm that God is without passions.

Christians who have been influenced by modern psychology and philosophy are eager to defend emotions, both in man and in God. Although they might acknowledge that those biblical passages that refer to God as if he has a physical body are instances of anthropomorphism, they refuse to admit that those passages that refer to God as if he has

emotions are instances of anthropopathism. However, they have been unable to offer an excuse for this hypocrisy.

The dictionary defines "emotion" as "disturbance, excitement; the affective aspect of consciousness; a state of feeling; a psychic and physical reaction (as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling and physiologically involving changes that prepare the body for immediate vigorous action."<sup>32</sup> The word originally refers to a disturbance of the mind. Although this meaning is now obsolete in colloquial speech, even in common usage, it remains a "psychic and physical *reaction*." In my view, a definition of emotion should include the idea of a disturbance of the mind that *may* interfere with the normal process of rational thought. The disturbance itself does not carry a negative connotation, but it is a description of what happens, although a disturbance of the mind would, of course, often produce negative consequences.

Contrary to popular teaching, the Bible never says that the mind consists of the will, intellect, and emotion. This division originates from secular psychology, not biblical psychology. Under this scheme, the will, intellect, and emotion are distinct parts of the mind, so that the mind is only real as the aggregate of the three. Since they are related but independent, there is no necessary relationship between the development of each part. Thus Christians who assume this framework would often say that a person must not only develop his intellect, but that he must also develop his emotion. But if this framework is false, then the recommendation tells us to do something that cannot be done, since it assumes a division in the mind that does not exist. The result is a perverted spiritual development.

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

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

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

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<sup>32</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition.*

mind of God is so integrated that he does only what he wills. As we increase in faith and holiness, our emotion should increasingly come under our conscious control, so that we become excited because we decide to become excited, become angry because we decide to become angry, and we can stop when we decide to stop.

Jesus experienced emotions, but what can we infer from this? He also experienced hunger and fatigue (Matthew 21:18; Luke 4:2; John 4:6), but this only proves that the Son of God took upon himself a human nature. Just as Jesus in his divine nature did not experience hunger or fatigue, he in his divine nature did not experience emotions. Only his human nature experienced hunger, fatigue, and emotions. Those instances when he experienced emotions were indeed disturbances of the mind (Mark 14:34), and since Hebrews 4:15 says that he never sinned, we conclude that not every disturbance of the mind is sinful. However, it is invalid to infer from this that emotions are good, or that it should not be restrained or suppressed. Therefore, the fact that Jesus experienced emotions only proves that he possessed a human nature and that not every disturbance of the mind is sinful.

On the other hand, the Gospels show that Jesus was always in full control of himself. He was so disturbed before his arrest that he bled through his skin, but he never lost control. He was able to pray to God, to resolve to fulfill his will, and to rebuke his disciples for falling asleep. He was under intense pressure, but he retained full control of his mental and physical functions. Sometimes things happen that disturb us, but to be disturbed in the mind is not part of sanctification. A person is not holy or spiritual just because his mind fluctuates like the waves of the ocean. Rather, Christ's self-control in the face of the most disturbing circumstances – his faith to walk on the stormy waters – is what his followers ought to emulate.

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

Although one portion of Scripture may emphasize a divine attribute, and another portion may emphasize a different attribute, this does not mean that God's attributes are truly separable. It does not mean that one attribute can override another, that one is more important than another, or that one more closely expresses God's essence than another. The Bible teaches that God *is* his attributes: 1 John 1:5 says, "God is light," and 1 John 4:16 says, "God is love." Therefore, God is not a being who is love with light as an attribute, or vice versa; rather, he is love and light, justice and mercy, power and wisdom, and so on.

Further, we should not think of God as emphasizing a certain attribute during one period in history, and then a different attribute during another period. Many people think that God emphasizes his wrath in the Old Testament and emphasizes his mercy in the New Testament. This is an outrageous misconception. It is the Old Testament that says, "His love endures forever" (Psalm 136), and it is the New Testament that says, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). The unity of God means

that he is both merciful and wrathful at all times, and that all his attributes exist in perfect harmony. He has always been merciful to his elect and wrathful to the reprobates, whether in the Old or New Testament.

The SPIRITUALITY of God is another metaphysical attribute. Jesus says, "God is spirit" (John 4:24). He is incorporeal; he has no physical body. In Deuteronomy 4:15-16, Moses says to the people of Israel, "You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman." God has "no form"; therefore, Moses forbids anyone from constructing an image that purports to resemble God's appearance, not even one that is in the form of a man.

If it is forbidden to construct a physical image of God because he has no form, then it is also forbidden to suppose that God has a form in our theology. Rather, we must think of him only as incorporeal spirit. More than a few people, who claim to be Christians, have succumbed to the teaching that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit have bodies. But it is heresy; it is a pagan doctrine rather than a Christian one. Rather, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit do not have bodies. And although God the Son has taken up a human body his divine attributes are not mingled or confused with the human attributes. So, to illustrate, God the Son is omnipresent in his divine nature, but his human nature is not omnipresent.

Since the Bible teaches that God is spirit and that he has no form, any passage that speaks about God as if he has a body is obviously figurative. When they are understood this way, both kinds of passages make good sense, whereas to interpret them in the opposite direction would not. That is, if it is thought that God has a physical body, then those passages that say he is spirit and that he has no form would generate confusion, if not outright contradiction. And this problem would arise because they are not supposed to be interpreted this way.

For example, 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." To infer from this that God has physical eyes would contradict the passages that speak about the nature of his being, that he is spirit and that he has no form. Moreover, to say that God sees with physical eyes would compromise his omniscience, since then he would not see the things and places where his eyes are not looking. And if we assume an unreliable scientific explanation for the moment, our eyes do not work by themselves, but they are organs that work with our brain and optical nerves as they interpret reflected light. For his physical eyes to be useful, God must then also have a brain, optical nerves, a spinal cord – just like a man. This is indeed what some heresies maintain, but it contradicts the doctrines of divine transcendence and invisibility (1 Timothy 1:17; Job 9:11). For God to gain knowledge by the interpretation of reflected light would also make it possible for him to be misled by optional illusions, mirages, and so on, as men often are misled. Thus the false interpretation of 2 Chronicles 16:9 results in absurdities and contradictions. The verse is figurative, and the point is that God is aware of all that happens on the earth.

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

Then, consider Luke 11:20: "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you." Jesus says that he casts out demons by "the finger of God," and so it seems to some that God has a hand with fingers. However, in the parallel passage of Matthew 12:28, Jesus says that he casts out demons "by the Spirit of God." Here one verse explains the other, and one verse restricts the way that the other verse can be interpreted. It is obvious that the finger of God is figurative of the Spirit of God, and not that God possesses bodily parts like human fingers.

The Bible is consistent in this. When it talks about God's being, it teaches that he is spirit and that he has no form. When it talks about his ability and his work, it sometimes uses anthropomorphisms, so that it refers to his hands, arms, eyes, ears, and so on. The former refers to what he *is*, and the latter refers to what he *does*. The difference is very definite and easy to perceive. And given those passages that tell us about the being of God, it would be heretical to interpret the other passages as teaching that God has a body.

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

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

Therefore, the fact that God is infinite means that he is not just a greater version of ourselves. He is not a super-man, because he is not a man at all. His power and wisdom are infinitely greater than ours, not just much greater. An understanding of this fact ought to ignite the fear of God in us, and put an end to the flippant attitude that even Christians have toward God.



Even those who claim to love God often challenge his words and his ways. However, a true Christian does not defy God. Those who truly know God and love him would also fear him. Unlike those whom God rescued from Egypt but who murmured against him, we should heed the words of Ecclesiastes 5:2, "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few."

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

Nevertheless, the IMMANENCE of God reminds us that he is not distant from us in a way that makes personal attention and communication from him impossible. The Bible portrays a God who is involved in human history and individual lives. He is very different from and superior to us, but he is still able to interact with us. God is both transcendent and immanent, and these two attributes do not contradict or diminish each other.

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

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

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

God is a TRINITY. There is only one God, and this God is Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. All the divine attributes apply to each member of the Godhead. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit fulfilled their unique roles at the baptism of Christ:

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

What is sometimes called the Trinitarian Benediction says, "May the grace of *the Lord Jesus Christ*, and the love of *God*, and the fellowship of *the Holy Spirit* be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14).

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

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

The first two would imply that there are three separate beings. And since the third retains the word "name" in the singular, it does not make a clear distinction between the three persons. But Jesus does not state the command in any of these three ways. Rather, the verse says, "...into the name of *the* Father and of *the* Son and of *the* Holy Spirit." The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each receives a definite article, thus indicating a clear distinction between the three, but the word "name" remains in the singular, thus indicating the essential unity and equality of the three.

Another text is 1 Peter 1:1-2. It assumes the Trinity and indicates the role each member plays in redemption:

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

The historic doctrinal formulation of the Trinity says that God is "one in essence and three in person." The proposition entails no contradiction. For there to be a contradiction, we must affirm that "A is non-A." In our case, this translates into, "God is one and not one," "God is three and not three," "God is one in essence and three in essence," or "God is one in person and three in person." There is contradiction only if we affirm that God is one and not one or that God is one and three at the same time and in the same sense. However, the doctrine says that God is one in one sense and three in a different sense.

The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct "persons" because they represent three systems of consciousness. To illustrate, all three knew that Christ would die on the cross to save the chosen ones, but God the Father or God the Spirit did not think, "*I will* die on the cross to save the chosen ones." Instead, they thought, "*He will*" – that is, the Son – "die on the cross to save the chosen ones." On the other hand, God the Son affirmed the same thought in the first person: "*I will* die on the cross to save the chosen ones." Thus

although all three members possess omniscience, they have different relationships to the known propositions.

The "essence" in the doctrinal formulation refers to the divine attributes, or the very definition of God. All three persons fulfill the definition of deity, but this does not become tritheism because the very definition of deity involves all three members, so that each member is not an independent deity. The only idea of God in the Bible is the Trinity – it never asserts a non-triune God. Thus when the Bible says that there is one God, it means that there is one Trinity.

The objections that the doctrine is self-contradictory and that it amounts to tritheism, therefore, entail a contrast between a biblical idea of God, where the one God is triune, and a non-biblical idea of God, where one God might mean a non-triune deity. In other words, to suggest that the doctrine teaches that God is one and three, and so contradicts itself, or that it teaches three deities, means that the biblical idea of God has already been ignored. And when an objection against a doctrine ignores what the doctrine teaches, it is an irrelevant objection. The Christian idea of God is bound to the Trinity. It affirms and assumes that God is a Trinity, and that there is only one Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

Other attacks on the Trinity sometimes deny the deity of one or more persons of the Godhead. Since the deity of the Father is not in dispute, and a later chapter will discuss the deity of Christ, here we will consider only the person and deity of the Holy Spirit.

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

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

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

Additional passages on the deity of the Holy Spirit include:

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

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<sup>33</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *The View from Above* and *Reflections on First Timothy*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Concluding our overview of God's metaphysical attributes, we now examine some of his other attributes, such as those that have to do with his intellect, character, and power.

The divine attributes are closely related to one another, and so it is unavoidable that we have already mentioned the OMNISCIENCE of God several times. The fact that God is omniscient means that he knows all propositions. Some people add that he also knows the relationships between all propositions. This is redundant because the relationships

between propositions can be stated as propositions as well. It is also unnecessary to say that God knows which propositions are true or false, and which refer to actual or potential situations, since these can also be stated as propositions. Therefore, it is sufficient to say that divine omniscience means that God knows all propositions, and this is to affirm that God possesses all knowledge.

For us to "think through" something implies a process, or a succession of ideas in our mind where one thought leads to another. And the fact that our minds are finite means that we can hold only a limited number of propositions in our immediate consciousness at any moment. But since God is timeless, all knowledge exists before his mind as an eternal intuition. And since he possesses unlimited intellectual power, he is able to hold all propositions in his immediate consciousness at all times. Thus the mind of God perceives all things with exhaustive clarity and depth, including things that pertain to our future.

The Bible says, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). God is "perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16), and he "[makes] known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come" (Isaiah 46:10).

His complete knowledge of everything includes our thoughts and intentions: "For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths" (Proverbs 5:21); "the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts" (1 Chronicles 28:9); "I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds" (Revelation 2:23).

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

Additional passages on God's omniscience include:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Non-Christians demands to know if God can create something that amounts to a contradiction. However, this is an unintelligent challenge because it suffers from a categorical fallacy, so that it is unintelligible and meaningless. To illustrate, it makes sense to ask "How big is your cat?" because size is a category that applies to physical objects like animals. It also makes sense to ask "How fast is your car?" and "How smart is your son?" However, it makes no sense to ask, "Is the color green fast or slow?" or "Is that rock smart or stupid?" Speed does not apply to color and intelligence does not apply to a rock. Green cannot be fast or slow; a rock cannot be smart or stupid.

This is the problem with the challenge as to whether God can create or perform a contradiction. It is supposed to pose a dilemma to the Christian for affirming the doctrine of divine omnipotence. Perhaps the most popular example is: "Can God create a rock so large or heavy that he cannot lift it?" The challenge commits a categorical fallacy, and betrays the non-Christian's lack of intelligence. God is incorporeal, so that physical forces do not act upon or against him at all. There is nothing to make the rock large or heavy to God, since size and weight bare no application to him. Whether the object is large or heavy to man is irrelevant. When God creates a rock, he will always be able to do anything he wants with it.

Something like "a square circle" is a contradiction. So the non-Christian asks, "Can God create a square circle?" But the category of ability does not apply to the creation of a contradiction, because a contradiction is not something to be created – a contradiction is *nothing*. Therefore, it is meaningless to ask whether God can create a square circle, because it is nothing to be done at all. God does not act contrary to his own will or nature, and he does not perform contradictions, since contradictions are nothing to be performed.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> When responding to the challenge of whether God can create or perform contradictions (often intended as a challenge to the coherence of biblical theism), many Christians are too quick to insist that divine

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

Other biblical passages on God's omnipotence include:

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

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omnipotence does not mean that God can do everything. For example, God "cannot" lie or die. Then, they apply this to contradictions, saying that God cannot create or perform them.

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

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

Likewise, when we say that God "cannot die," are we saying that he lacks the ability to die, or should we rather say that death does not apply to the Eternal in the first place? Nothing eternal "can" die, but the "can" here has nothing to do with ability – the category does not apply at all. The eternal does not die, and when we say that God "cannot" die, we are referring to the utter impossibility of it, the inconceivability of it, the inapplicability of it, and not his ability or inability.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The LOVE of God is a favorite topic, but it is also one of the most abused and distorted Christian teaching. Although it is often said that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), very few people understand what this means. An adequate exposition of the doctrine will entail corrections to common misunderstandings.

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

Then, Acts 10:34-35 states, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." This refers to a national or ethnic universality, that God has chosen some people to be saved from "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). It does not say that God accepts everyone no matter what, but that he accepts only those who approach



him on his terms, and the Bible makes it clear that only those whom God has chosen for salvation are divinely enabled come to him in the prescribed manner, that is, through faith in Jesus Christ.

God chooses those whom he will save without consideration of any prior or foreseen condition in them, and then he supplies all the necessary things by which he makes them right with himself, such as faith in Christ. Therefore, it is accurate to say that God unconditionally loves the chosen ones; however, he does not unconditionally love everyone. It is true that God does not show favoritism, but this means that he condemns all reprobates and that he saves his chosen ones regardless of their ethnic and social background, or any other condition in them. It does not mean that he favors every person.

God shows a natural benevolence to his creatures. Jesus says, "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). He sends rain and supplies other non-spiritual benefits in his providential government over creation. This is a natural benevolence since the benefits included are given to both Christians and non-Christians, and no one can survive without this benevolence. Natural provisions such as air, light, food, and certain kinds of knowledge all come under this aspect of God's providence. The "love" of God is universal only when the meaning is restricted to natural providence (see Matthew 5:43-48). It includes no spiritual benefit, and none of that concern that a father would have for his children.<sup>35</sup>

But if God cares only for his chosen ones, why does he provide natural benefits to the reprobates? And if non-Christians are so repulsive to him, why does he put up with them for so long before he sends them to hell to torture them forever? Paul explains in Romans 9, "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory...?" (v. 22-23). In other words, God keeps non-Christians alive and functional so that they can provide an environment for Christians to interact with, to learn and practice the word of God, and to witness God's wrath against these people that refuse to believe in Jesus Christ.

Suppose a man wishes to preserve some beer bottles to use as targets when he plays with his rifle, and to show off his marksmanship to his children. He would collect these bottles, clean them, and preserve them in a safe place. He offers to these bottles a natural

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<sup>35</sup> Jesus' command to love our enemies refers to natural benevolence or some practical action, even including prayer, but it does not suggest the kind of fatherly or brotherly love that is shared in the family of God: "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:27-31). Just as the Father offers natural benefits to those who hate him, such as food and rain, to love our enemies is to "do good" to them, to offer them natural benefits. The "good" that Jesus has in mind is mainly social and material. Paul also teaches that this is what it means to love our enemies: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:20-21).

benevolence, but he has no personal concern for them as he does his children. And when the time comes he will line them up and shoot them to a thousand pieces without any remorse, while his children praise him and rejoice with him.

Does this mean that non-Christians are preserved and cared for by divine providence, just so they can be used and discarded? This is precisely what Paul says in his letter to the Romans. And he adds that God has "the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use" (v. 21). In those days, "common" vessels include receptacles for trash and feces. This is God's estimation of non-Christians. It also offers a basis to illustrate God's great mercy toward those of us who believe in Jesus Christ – it is as if we have been changed from toilets where people dump their excrements into spectacular vases through which God displays the beauty of his wisdom, power, and glory.

God has determined to save the elect and to condemn the reprobates. The elect are those whom God has chosen to save from sin and hell by producing in them faith in the Lord Jesus. The reprobates are those whom God has chosen to damn. Like the elect, they are also created in sin, but unlike the elect, God hardens their hearts against the gospel so that they will never be saved through faith in Christ. In this context, God loves the elect and hates the reprobates. As Romans 9:13 says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

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

There are numerous biblical verses on holy hatred against sinners:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is popular to teach that "God hates the sin but loves the sinner," and that Christians should hold such an attitude. But the above verses explicitly contradict the notion that we are to love the sinners but hate their sins; rather, they indicate that we are to hate both the evil people and their evil deeds.

Some people are so prejudiced against the biblical teaching that God hates the reprobates that they insist in opposing it even when they show that they clearly know better.

For example, H. L. Drumwright, Jr. writes, "It must...be recognized that the Hebrew thought-form makes no sharp distinction between the individual and his deeds. A man in Hebrew thought is the sum total of the actions of his life..."<sup>36</sup> This is correct, and it follows that there is no sharp distinction between hating a man and his deeds. But Drumwright concludes the opposite! He continues, "...so that to say God hated a man is not to say that God was maliciously disposed toward a particular personality, but to note divine opposition to evil that was registered in that life."<sup>37</sup>

This is pure lunacy. If  $A = B$ , then to hate  $A$  is to hate  $B$ ; there is no difference. But according to Drumwright, if  $A = B$ , and God says he hates  $A$ , somehow it means that he hates only  $B$  and not  $A$ . He is saying that because a person ( $A$ ) is the sum total of his actions ( $B$ ), when God says that he hates a person ( $A$ ), he does not in fact hate the person ( $A$ ), but only the sum total of his actions ( $B$ ). This inference is ridiculous. He acknowledges that a person *is* the sum total of his actions ( $A = B$ ); therefore, it is impossible that whatever applies to  $A$  is somehow transferred to  $B$  so that it no longer applies to  $A$ . But if  $A = B$ , then whatever applies to *either*  $A$  or  $B$  applies to *both*  $A$  and  $B$ . If God hates *either*  $A$  or  $B$ , he hates *both*  $A$  and  $B$ , since  $A$  *is*  $B$ . This is so obvious that it takes a professional scholar to confuse the issue. Moreover, if Drumwright is correct, then we wonder what it means when the Bible says that God loves a person. Does he love anyone at all, or just his actions?

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<sup>36</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975, 1976; p. 46.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

What controls Drumwright's thinking is a prior determination that God does not hate any person. He insists on this position regardless of what the Bible teaches, and the result is his gross incompetence in theological scholarship. Based on the first portion of his statement, that in Hebrew thinking a person is the sum of his actions, the only possible conclusion is the one proposed here, that God hates both the reprobate and his evil deeds, precisely because a person is the sum of his beliefs, thoughts, and actions.

However, God sovereignly decided to extend mercy to his chosen ones, and to impute to them the very righteousness of Christ, who was "slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). From the standpoint of time and history, the chosen ones also begin as sinners, and deserve to be hated by God. But God placed his love upon them in eternity, redeemed them through the work of Christ, determined to transform them by his Spirit (Ezekiel 11:19), and foreordained the good works that they are to perform (Ephesians 2:10). The chosen ones are "predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Romans 8:29). "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18).

God sent Christ to redeem the chosen ones because he loved them, but since the elect would also be sinners, and God hates sinners, how could he love those that he should hate? This is an insoluble problem under INFRALAPSARIANISM, in which the decree for the fall of all men occurs before the decree to redeem the chosen ones, so that the decrees follow a historical order. But the problem does not appear under SUPRALAPSARIANISM, in which the election of some men to be saved in Christ occurs before the decree for the fall of all men, so that the various decrees follow a teleological order. That is, God loved the chosen ones and decreed their salvation before he decreed that all men would become sinners. But in order for some men to be saved and some to be damned, all men must become sinners, and therefore he also decreed that all men would become sinners. Under this scheme, God's love for the chosen ones is easily explained, even though in time and history they would first appear as sinners before they are made righteous through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>38</sup>

In any case, the Bible says that God regards the wickedness of the reprobates as continuous:

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

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

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

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<sup>38</sup> When speaking of the order of eternal decrees, we are of course considering only a logical order and not a temporal one, since all thoughts are simultaneous in the mind of God.

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

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

But if a person is the aggregate of his thoughts and actions, and the thoughts and actions of the reprobates are continuously evil, so that the totality of his life – the totality of his person – is evil, then it is nonsense to say that we should love the sinner and hate the sin, since one cannot be considered apart from the other. In other words, if we were to hate the sins of a reprobate person, there would be nothing left of the person for us to love. As John Gerstner says, "As far as 'hatred of sins' is concerned, sins do not exist apart from the sinner. God does hate sinning, killing, stealing, lying, lusting, etc., but this alludes to the perpetrator of these crimes."<sup>39</sup>

Peter Kreeft once told a homosexual college professor, "I love the sinner but hate the sin."<sup>40</sup> After some discussion, the professor responded:

Well, suppose the shoe was on the other foot. Suppose *you* were in the minority. Suppose what you wanted to do was to have churches and sacraments and Bibles and prayers, and those in power said to you: "We hate that. We hate what you do. We will do all in our power to stop you from doing what you do. But we love you. We love what you are. We love Christians; we just hate Christianity. We love worshipers; we just hate worship. And we're going to put every possible pressure on you to feel ashamed about worshiping and make you repent of your sin of worshiping. But we love you. We affirm your being. We just reject your doing." Tell me, how would that make you feel? Would you accept that distinction?<sup>41</sup>

Kreeft had to admit that hatred directed against Christianity is tantamount to hatred directed against the Christian: "You're right. I would not be comfortable with that distinction. I would not be able to accept it. In fact, I would say pretty much what you just said: that you're trying to kill my identity."<sup>42</sup>

Misconceptions about what it means to love our enemies have resulted in a loss of holy indignation and bold opposition against those who hate God. Christ's command tells us only to do good to those who hate us. It is like the natural benevolence that God shows toward all men (Matthew 5:43-45). But the Bible never tells us to think of the non-

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<sup>39</sup> John H. Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*; Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000; p. 211.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Kreeft, *How to Win the Culture War*; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002; p. 90.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94. Kreeft himself is a Catholic, not a Christian.

Christians as something that they are not; rather, its position is that all non-Christians are fools and rebels, stupid and sinful. For a person to think of them as something better amounts to a rejection of divine revelation, and casts doubt on his own faith and allegiance toward Christ.

Therefore, although we are to exhibit a natural benevolence toward non-Christians, we must also be jealous for God's honor and imitate his holy hatred toward them. Most Christians "love" their enemies in a way that amounts to rebellion against God. They should be admonished and disciplined. We "love" non-Christians in the way commanded by Christ when we offer to do them good and refuse to do them harm (Romans 12:20-21, 13:10). But we should have "nothing but hatred" (Psalm 139:22) toward non-Christians in the sense that we oppose all of who they are, what they believe, and what they do. We strive to diminish their influence and undermine their agenda by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Contrary to popular belief, we are even to rejoice over God's punishments upon the non-Christians:

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

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

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

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

Biblical hatred is defined as "an intense aversion or active hostility that is expressed in settled opposition to a person or thing."<sup>43</sup> In this context, love and hate are not emotions, but volitions. They are policies of thought and action. Since God is impassable, and his mind cannot be disturbed, it means that divine love is not a disturbance of the mind, but an intellectual disposition of favor and mercy. And hate is a disposition of disfavor and judgment. Likewise, when the Bible commands Christians to hate both the sinners and their sins, it is addressing our intellectual dispositions – our volitions, not emotions.

Most Christians do not understand in what sense we are to love non-Christians and in what sense we are to hate them. But now it is clear that we love the non-Christians in the restricted sense of natural benevolence, but we hate them in the broad sense, that we are hostile to everything about them. The "love" that God and Christians show toward non-Christians is limited to natural and temporal kindness, but on the spiritual and ideological level, God and Christians are completely opposed to the non-Christians. Of course, Christians can pray that the non-Christians be converted. But it remains that as long as they are non-Christians, it is impossible to show brotherly love toward them, since they

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<sup>43</sup> *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3; p. 46.*

are not brothers. Rather, the only "love" that God and Christians can show them is the kind that we show to animals – we feed them, house them, and clean up after them.

Complete hostility to another person's thoughts and actions, including his beliefs, desires, ambitions, preferences, values, lifestyles, habits, and so on, which is the same as hating the person himself, is hatred at the deepest level. This hatred is much deeper than the kind that would strip him of his natural welfare. By this definition, God and Christians hate non-Christians at the deepest level possible, and likewise, non-Christians hate God and Christians at the deepest level possible.

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

Likewise, I may treat the non-Christian with kindness in speech and action (and in this sense I walk in "love" toward him), but if I regard his entire worldview as stupid and his whole lifestyle as sinful, and if it is my mission from God to arrange all aspects of my life in opposition to the non-Christian's worldview and lifestyle, then I indeed hate him at the deepest level possible.

The reason we do good to the non-Christians even though we have "nothing but hatred" (Psalm 139:22) for them is that God has reserved for himself the right to avenge his own honor and to avenge his chosen ones: "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). This is why Christians must not spread their faith and undermine the non-Christians through unjust or violent methods. It is up to God to punish them.

Of course, Christians should endorse legal punishments against non-Christians, including the execution of dangerous criminals (Romans 13:4).<sup>44</sup> God ordained the government for this purpose. On the other hand, the church must use spiritual weapons to advance its cause, so that we demolish the wicked mainly through the publication of the word of God in preaching, teaching, and writing:

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

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<sup>44</sup> Although God pardons the chosen ones of their sins, punishments dispensed by earthly governments apply also to Christians who have committed crimes.



God's "love" applies to all people in the restricted sense of a natural benevolence. That is, divine providence sustains the lives of all creatures so that God's plans may be carried out, including the display of his wrath. When applied to the chosen ones, God's love refers to his favorable disposition without restriction to the natural realm: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). The context of the verse restricts "us all" to the elect, and not all men. Thus God lavishes his sacrificial love upon those whom he has chosen for salvation. Whereas there is a natural benevolence extended to all men, there is a special benevolence that is directed only to those whom God has chosen, an effectual love that results in their salvation.

This is the GRACE of God. The popular distinction between common grace and special or saving grace is unbiblical, because natural benevolence is not grace. This natural benevolence is called "love" because Jesus refers to it this way in Matthew 5:43-48, but the context restricts the meaning to the natural realm. This is confirmed by other biblical passages, as demonstrated earlier. It is called benevolence because it enables the natural survival of creatures. Thus this "love" does not include a favorable disposition, since it is merely a policy for the provision of natural sustenance. This is different from, and even opposed to, the idea of common grace. But now that the topic turns to salvation, in which God justifies the believer and rescues him from hell, the benefits extended belong to an altogether superior dimension. This is not a natural benevolence akin to what a man shows to plants and animals, but the deep affection and commitment that a man shows to his family. This is divine grace.

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

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

We will continue to discuss the doctrine of divine election throughout this book, but from these verses alone it is obvious that not every person will be saved or can be saved. God indeed accepts anyone who comes to him, but a person comes to him only because God causes him to do so, and he does not cause everyone to come. One can be saved only if God chooses him and enables him to believe the gospel, but he does not choose or enable every person.

Therefore, God does not love every person. Concerning those whom God loves, Paul writes, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). This does not apply to the reprobates, or those whom God has created for damnation, since soon they will be separated from God's love, and even from his natural preservation.

Other passages on God's love for his chosen ones include:

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

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:4-5)

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

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

One of the most precious but neglected benefits of God's love toward Christians is spiritual illumination:

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

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

Theological knowledge, or intellectual knowledge about God, is one of the most despised spiritual gifts. It is often regarded as unholy and unspiritual. However, Jesus says that to be God's friend means to have knowledge about him, about his being, his principles, and his plans and works. Those who claim to be Christians but who scorn doctrinal studies do

not truly love God, even though they would like to think that they love him. But to love God by our own definition and on our own terms is not to regard him as God, and thus not to love him at all.

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

This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but *let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me*, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)<sup>45</sup>

Knowledge about God is the most valuable treasure, and all else is "dung" in comparison (Philippians 3:8, KJV). When God provides reliable information about himself to his chosen ones, he gives them one of the greatest gifts that he can bestow.

The Bible says that God's children should imitate the Father's love. The first and greatest commandment is to love God, and the second is to love other people:

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

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

A common misconception about God's love is that it is only a greater version of human fondness and courtesy.<sup>46</sup> This is what many people mean when they claim that they love God – they are fond of him. Now, to the extent that a person has a distorted view of God, this means that he is fond of his misconception of God, so that he is not even fond of God at all. False Christians, or those who claim to be Christians but are not, would turn against God and hate him once they find out what he is truly like. God is the triune deity who judges every thought and intention, demands exclusive worship and obedience, condemns all those he created for damnation, redeems only those he has chosen for salvation, proclaims the Christian faith alone as truth, and does all that he pleases. Such a God is repugnant to non-Christians.

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<sup>45</sup> The knowledge of God is not a mystical knowing as aberrant Christianity affirms, but an intellectual one. The verse uses the words, "understands and knows"; it is a "knowing that" or "knowing about" the things of God.

<sup>46</sup> *Oxford American Dictionary of Current English*: "deep affection or fondness...delight in; admire; greatly cherish."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A closer look at the "first and greatest commandment" will further emphasize this. Here are some relevant biblical passages:

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

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

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

one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Mark 12:28-33)

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

1. "...with all your heart"
2. "...with all your soul"
3. "...with all your strength"
4. "...with all your mind"<sup>47</sup>

Jesus' answer comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-9.<sup>48</sup> However, in Deuteronomy, Moses only says to love God:

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

Thus in his answer Jesus adds his interpretation of the greatest commandment, namely, that we must love God with all our mind, and this interpretation is authoritative and binding. Nevertheless, the Deuteronomy passage itself provides sufficient information for this conclusion, that the commandment is telling us to love God with our minds. Verse 5 is the one that says, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Then, the verses that come after it explain what the commandment implies:

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

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

Therefore, rather than to divorce love for God and the intellectual life, or to regard them as antagonistic to each other, the Bible explicitly states that love for God rests upon our

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<sup>47</sup> The passage from Matthew leaves out "strength," but this helps reinforce the fact that the terms are synonymous in the first place.

<sup>48</sup> "Love your neighbor as yourself" comes from Leviticus 19:18.

intellect. The greatest commandment is to love God with our mind. Paul writes to the Colossians: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds" (Colossians 1:21), and Jesus explains that sin originates from the mind: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19).<sup>49</sup> Non-Christians hate God with their minds, but regeneration reverses this, and enables the chosen ones to fulfill the greatest commandment. God says that the new covenant is one in which, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33; also Hebrews 10:16).

As for love toward other people, in addition to what has been said, Paul writes that "love is the *fulfillment* of the law" (Romans 13:10). Many people often think that love is the *replacement* of the law, and it renders the Old Testament moral commands irrelevant. But the Bible teaches that to walk in love is to fulfill the law, or to do what it says rather than to ignore it.<sup>50</sup>

The ceremonial laws – that is, the rituals – have been fulfilled in Christ. The things that they foreshadowed have not been done away with, but have become reality in the person of Christ. Since the priesthood of Christ is continuous, the fulfillment of these laws are still in effect. Therefore, there is now no need for such things as the animal sacrifices and purification rites.

On the other hand, God's moral laws remain relevant and binding. To walk in love toward other human beings is to obey the moral laws concerning how we should treat people. For example, we must not steal from others or lie about them; we are to uphold justice and show mercy to the poor. Paul writes:

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

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

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<sup>49</sup> Man is a dichotomy, and consists of soul (mind, intellect, heart, or spirit) and body. He is not a trichotomy of spirit (heart), soul (mind, intellect), and body. The heart or the spirit is the soul (mind or intellect) of man. In the passages under discussion, heart, soul, and strength are synonymous terms, used for emphasis, and refer to a person's inner being, which Jesus interprets as the mind of man. Some commentators impose fanciful distinctions between these terms in this verse, but this is illegitimate and unnecessary. Even if Jesus has not added the word "mind," the commandment would mean the same thing as what is claimed here, since the heart and soul are synonymous with the mind. See Vincent Cheung, *Godliness with Contentment*, chapter 2.

<sup>50</sup> Jesus says in Matthew 23:23 that the "more important matters of the law" include "justice, mercy, and faith." So the New Testament did not introduce these concepts, as if they were not known before; rather, it reinforces them.

To review, God exhibits a natural benevolence toward all his creatures, and it is called "love" in this restricted sense. The purpose is to preserve them for his use, including the display of his wrath when he punishes them for their sins. But to the chosen ones, God's love also means self-sacrifice (in redeeming them through Christ) and self-disclosure (in providing them theological knowledge). Among other things, to love God means to devote our intellect to the worship and service of God, to acquire knowledge about him and his commands, and to obey all biblical precepts. As for love toward men, it means to obey God's moral laws in our relationships with people, and to treat them the way God tells us to treat them.

The love of God is consistent with his JUSTICE or RIGHTEOUSNESS. Since God is the ultimate authority, and all propositions find meaning only in relation to him, all moral concepts are defined by his nature. To say that God is loving and just is to say that he always acts according to his nature, with specific emphasis on the type of actions that the words love and justice describe.

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

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

The fact that justice is the nature of God means that he punishes evildoers. Since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), it means that he must punish all men unless there is a way to satisfy his justice without destroying those he wishes to save. To accomplish this, God sent Jesus Christ to die for the chosen ones, thereby saving from damnation those he has foreordained to have faith in him. On the other hand, "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

God presented Christ "as a sacrifice of atonement" (Romans 3:25) so that God "might be just and the justifier" (v. 26, NASB) of those who have faith in Christ. This tells us how God can be the justifier of sinners if his own nature of justice demands that he punishes sinners. God sent Jesus to die for the chosen ones, to suffer the punishment that they deserved. Thus God maintains his own standard of justice in condemning the non-



Christians, but he is also upholds justice as he pardons the chosen ones, the Christians, because Jesus Christ has paid for their sins.<sup>51</sup>

Other passages on the justice and righteousness of God include:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One purpose of the reprobates – that is, "the objects of his wrath" or those who are "prepared for destruction" – is that God may reveal this aspect of his nature to "the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory" (Romans 9:22-23). Since Christians have been "saved from God's wrath" (Romans 5:9) through Jesus Christ, this is one divine attribute that they will never experience, and therefore it must be demonstrated

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<sup>51</sup> Although we will discuss definite atonement later in this book, this explanation about the work of Christ already implies that the atonement was particular and not universal. Christ died only for the chosen ones, and not every human person. If Christ had died for the sins of everyone, God would have no basis to condemn anyone. However, the Bible says that God will condemn many non-Christians; therefore, Christ did not die for the reprobates, or those whom God created for damnation.

to them in other people. Recall that one benefit God gives to the chosen ones is information about himself, and this demonstrates his commitment to make himself known to his people. That is, he would create billions of non-Christians and throw them into a lake of fire to torture them with endless pain and agony in order to show his own children this wonderful aspect of his holy nature.

The wrath of God is his divine anger against all that is contrary to holiness and righteousness; it is his intense hatred toward sin and wickedness. Unlike much of human anger, divine wrath is not emotional or petty, but it stems from God's holy nature, and it is good and justified.<sup>52</sup> This divine anger and hatred is directed against all who reject Jesus Christ:

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

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

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

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

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

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

But the wrath of God will not come upon the elect: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). God appointed the reprobates to "suffer wrath," but he has appointed us to "receive salvation"

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<sup>52</sup> Again, the impassability of God implies that his anger is a policy of thought and action rather than an emotion, or a disturbance of the mind.

through Christ. Therefore, we can credit our salvation only to God's sovereign appointment, and not to a person's choice to follow Christ. This is because a person's choice is not free, but God is the one who causes his choice (Romans 9:18), so that no one may boast before him.

God's election of only some people for salvation is discussed throughout the book, because the doctrine is stated and assumed throughout Scripture, so that it is necessary to mention it again and again in order to make sense of other doctrines. And since we have already brought up the subjects of election and wrath, we should also consider the divine attribute of the WILL of God.<sup>53</sup>

Theologians distinguish between the "secret" and the "revealed" will of God on the basis of Deuteronomy 29:29: "The *secret* things belong to the LORD our God, but the things *revealed* belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." The secret things refer to God's decrees, as in what *he would do*. The revealed things refer to God's precepts, as in what *we should do*. Since the two do not overlap, there is never a conflict between them. There is no paradox or contradiction.

There are those who assert that there are "two wills" in God, and this is said in a sense that maintains an internal tension or "mystery" for the doctrine. But it is confusing and blasphemous.<sup>54</sup> Rather, the Bible uses the word "will" in two different senses. And when a word is used in two different senses, it means that two different words can be used instead. If we, for the purpose of a precise theological discussion, attach only one meaning to a word, then even if we continue to use the word "will," it would be limited to only one thing – either decree or precept, not both. In fact, we can use the words "decree" and "precept," and avoid the word "will" altogether.

It is not true that there are two wills in God. We do not say that there are two decrees and two precepts in God, because decree and precept refer to different things. And it is just as ridiculous to say that there are two wills in God. There is a will and a precept, or a decree and a will, or there is a decree and precept, but not a will and a will. Once it is pointed out that there are two distinct ideas that can be expressed with two different words, all confusion disappears, and the blasphemy that presents God as insane disappears along with it. The Bible does not teach that there are two wills in God, but it merely uses the same word to refer to two different things. There would be no problem if theologians were not so stupid or so eager to discover a paradox.

In any case, "the things revealed" include all that is recorded in Scripture – God's precepts, commands, doctrines, and predictions. Because the Scripture has been revealed to us, it "belongs" to us. And it is the immediate object to which we owe our allegiance and obedience – "that we may *follow all the words* of this law." On the other hand, the "secret things" belong to God. People are disappointed when they attempt to discover God's secret will, and many of them fall into serious spiritual error as a result. The very

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<sup>53</sup> The will refers to the decision-making function of the mind. It is not a part of the person that is separate from the intellect.

<sup>54</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Blasphemy and Mystery*.

nature of his secret will is that it is concealed, and those who try to penetrate it will always fail. They chase after visions, dreams, and prophecies – sometimes even by forbidden means, such as astrology and various kinds of divination.

Christians must affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, that "the things revealed" contain enough information for men to make all kinds of decisions. The Bible is able to equip a person "for *every* good work" (2 Timothy 3:17). This necessarily means that it contains enough information so that a person who knows and obeys it perfectly will never think or do anything that displeases God. Of course, it is true that no one knows and obeys the Bible perfectly, but this is irrelevant to the point being made. Rather, the point is that Scripture contains all the information needed for perfection, since it asserts that it can equip a person for "every" good work. It contains all the information a person needs to live a life that is fully acceptable to God. It may not show us everything that we wish to know in order to satisfy our curiosity, but it includes all that God wishes us to know. It is sufficient so that we will not require additional or personal directions about our lives and circumstances to make decisions that are pleasing to God. Again, whether we will learn and follow the Bible is another matter, but the information is available.

As for God's secret will, it refers to things that we do not know until they happen, and includes things that are not predicted in Scripture.<sup>55</sup> The will of God – that is, his decree – determines every event, so that not even a sparrow can die unless he decides that it should happen: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father" (Matthew 10:29).<sup>56</sup> His will is inseparably connected to his power. As he declares in Isaiah 46:10, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." That is, "I make known the end from the beginning" corresponds to "I will do all that I please." His predictions are more than mere forecasts, but they are also declarations of what he will do. For God to predict the time and manner of a sparrow's death is to reveal his active decree concerning the time and manner of its death, or the time and manner of how God will cause it to die. For God to predict what will happen is to reveal what he will do. Anything that occurs must be willed and caused by God, else all the power of the universe cannot make it happen.

Although the Bible directly teaches the doctrine of election, this doctrine concerning the will of God in itself implies that God must be the one who chooses those who would receive salvation and that he must be the one who causes their salvation. It is not dependent on the will or work of man, but on God's mercy (Romans 9:16).<sup>57</sup> And he is not obligated to have mercy on anyone, but "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18).

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<sup>55</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Godliness with Contentment*, "Biblical Guidance and Decision-Making."

<sup>56</sup> The point of the verse is that God controls everything; therefore, the sparrow is not the smallest thing that he controls. Even a snowflake cannot land where it does apart from his active decree.

<sup>57</sup> REB: "Thus it does not depend on human will or effort, but on God's mercy."

God's will determines all the choices and circumstances of his creatures, so that nothing is up to man's "free will." In fact, because God is completely sovereign, man has no free will:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All things are decided and caused by God – nothing is free from his control, and he has not chosen to forego his control on anything. The doctrine is repulsive to those who abhor the rule and honor of God, and so they oppose it. But the doctrine is a source of comfort and celebration to those who love him. Why would we want it any other way, than for God to rule over all things? And what better life can we wish for, than to be ruled by God?

The doctrine contradicts the religious tradition that God does not decree evil or that he does not cause evil. Of course God does not make decrees against his other decrees. Since God is not insane, he has only one will, one desire. However, there is no problem for him to issue a decree that causes his creatures to violate his precepts. Whereas decrees are declarations of intentions about things that he would cause to happen, precepts are declarations of definitions, not intentions, and do not overlap with the decrees. It must be true that God decrees and causes events that are contrary to his precepts; otherwise, there

could be no evil, but there is indeed evil. Therefore, God must be the metaphysical author of sin and evil.

This does not mean that God himself is evil. To metaphysically cause evil and to morally commit evil are two different things. One is a matter of ability to cause something, while the other is a matter of conformity to a principle. The Bible teaches that God is the one who defines right and wrong, and that sin is a transgression of God's law. Therefore, for God to commit evil by causing evil – for this to be bad or wrong – he must declare a moral law that forbids himself to decree or to cause evil, that is, to decree or to cause his creatures to transgress his law. There is no biblical basis to suppose that God has declared such a law against himself. Indeed, the Bible teaches that all that God says and does are right and good. If he says it, it must be true. If he does it, it must be good. Therefore, since God is sovereign and there is evil, God must be the cause of evil, and since he is the cause of evil, it must be right and good for him to be the cause of evil.

There is no divine law that says God would be wrong if he were to be the cause of evil. Why, then, do men assume that it would be evil for God to be the author of sin? What law would God transgress? He would transgress the law of men, or what men have imposed upon him to define what a righteous God must or must not do. This is the sinister truth behind the religious tradition that says God is not the author of sin, for if he were to be such, it would mean that he has transgressed a law that men has declared against him. The necessarily conclusion is that the doctrine that God is not the author of sin, or that it is blasphemy and heresy to say that he is, is itself the real blasphemy and heresy. Unless God is the author of sin and evil, he is not completely sovereign, and he is not God. Therefore, to deny that God is the author of sin and evil is to deny God.

The Bible teaches that God's decrees and actions are always right and good. Since he is completely sovereign, and there is evil in this universe, this means that he is the one who decrees and causes evil in this universe. But since his decrees and actions are always right and good, then this means that it is right and good that he is the one who decrees and causes evil in this universe. The very fact that he decrees and causes evil means that it is right and good for him to do so.<sup>58</sup> There is no authority or standard higher than God by which to condemn him. If he thinks that it is good for him to cause evil, then it is good for him to cause evil.

This does not mean that evil is good, which would be a contradiction. Sin is defined as a transgression of God's moral law, and when we say that God is the author of sin, we are saying that God is the metaphysical cause of a creature's transgression of God's moral law. God transgresses no moral law, since there is no moral law against what he does, but he causes the creature to transgress. Morality relates to moral law. But there is no moral law against sovereign metaphysical power. It is right and good for God to metaphysically cause evil, just because he does it, and because he has not declared himself wrong for doing it. It is wrong for man to morally commit evil, because God has declared man wrong for doing it, although it is God who metaphysically causes man to do it. Therefore,

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<sup>58</sup> It is because of God's absolute sovereignty that the existence of evil poses no challenge to the biblical worldview. See Vincent Cheung, *The Author of Sin*.

God remains righteous, and the sinner remains evil. The distinctions are clear. There is no paradox or contradiction, and also no biblical or logical basis for objection against the doctrine.

Does this make God a tyrant? If the word simply means, "an absolute ruler,"<sup>59</sup> then of course God is a tyrant. And since he is the sole moral authority, the very fact that he is a tyrant means that he ought to be one, that it is good and just for him to be one. The negative connotations of the word apply only to human beings, since no man is worthy of absolute authority or capable to wield it. But God is "an absolute ruler" – that is what it means to be God.

The Bible calls frequent attention to the HOLINESS of God. The two aspects of this divine attribute place emphasis on his moral perfection and metaphysical transcendence. Both aspects imply separation from that which is morally or metaphysically inferior. To be holy is to be pure and righteous, and also aloof and separated.

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

Isaiah 57:15 is an inspiring verse that tells us how the holiness of God implies his "high and lofty" state of existence (transcendence), and still he is close to those who are "lowly in spirit" (immanence): "For this is what the high and lofty One says – he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.'"

Many people wish to stress the possibility of fellowship with God, and therefore they favor his immanence in a way that denies his transcendence. Detecting this distortion, others who desire to maintain a high view of God overcompensate by denying his immanence. However, divine transcendence does not exclude divine immanence, and divine immanence does not diminish divine transcendence. These two qualities are consistent with each other and with other divine attributes. Our passage says that God is indeed "high and lofty," and no one is like him, but by his own will, he is also close to his chosen ones, those who will humble themselves before him.

An understanding of divine holiness should move us to fear God. He is inherently worthy of extreme reverence, and it is a serious sin to deny him of proper worship:

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

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<sup>59</sup> Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.

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

God demands his people to imitate his holiness under both the Old and New Testaments: "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own" (Leviticus 20:26); "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). Of course, we cannot be transcendent if it means to assume a "high and lofty" state of existence in a metaphysical sense. Nevertheless, in eternity, God has chosen us for himself and has set us apart in his mind. And in time and history, once he causes us to have faith in Christ, we are made morally transcendent, separated from the filth of this world.

Moral separation from the world implies that our lifestyles should be very different from the non-Christians. It is inconceivable that Christians who live in accordance with God's precepts and who are able to perceive that moral implications pervade all that we do would have much common with non-Christians in their beliefs, preferences, communities, reading materials, and so on. Christians hate "even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh" (Jude 23).

Jesus prayed that God would not remove Christians from the world, but that he would protect them from evil while they are in the world: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). This verse is sometimes used to criticize those who think that retreat from the world is a necessary implication of holy living. They avoid contact with the world to avoid contamination. Given the foolish beliefs and the filthy lifestyles of the non-Christians, this is understandable. However, it is not what God commands, and this approach would lead to negligence of some of our Christian responsibilities such as charity and evangelism. Indeed, non-Christians are stupid, sinful, and thoroughly repulsive, but this is why they need Christ to save them. We were like them before Christ saved us. Rather, John 17:15 encourages Christians to invade the lives of non-Christians, and to engage these spiritual enemies by preaching and teaching the word of God, and to be salt and light to them through our holy speech and conduct (Matthew 5:13-16).

On the other hand, many people misuse John 17:15 in another way by turning it into a license for unhealthy relationships with non-Christians and an excuse to pursue human interests and ambitions. "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world" only means that Jesus does not ask God to physically remove Christians from the world, that God would not immediately take them to heaven once they come to faith in Christ. This is obvious from the context. Jesus discusses his upcoming physical departure in verses 11 and 13: "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you....I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world." Jesus was never "in the world" in the sense of being in sin or too involved with non-Christians, but he means that he was still physically present with the disciples. So in



verse 15, Jesus asks that the Father would not immediately remove Christians from the earth, but that he would protect them from the evil one.

Therefore, those who regard John 17:15 as an encouragement for Christians to become involved in the world in the sense of befriending non-Christians, or attending parties, or devoting their time to the arts, to politics, and so on, have distorted its meaning. Instead, the Bible commands us to refrain from illegitimate and unprofitable relationships with non-Christians:

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

As God has said:

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

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

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

Holiness entails separation from the world, mainly not in the physical sense, but in the spiritual sense. There is no need to establish Christian communities and monasteries, and to live as hermits, but it is imperative that we distinguish ourselves in our words, actions, habits, priorities, friends, reading materials, and forms of recreation. It is not true that we may associate with anyone we want – Paul warns, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Of course we should preach to sinners, and for this purpose we come into frequent contact with them, but whether we should associate with them as friends, let alone close friends, is a different issue. It is often argued that Jesus associated with sinners. This is true, and we should do the same if we are doing it in the same way and for the same purpose that he did it. However, Jesus associated with sinners not for social enjoyment, but he confronted them and demanded full spiritual conversion from them.

For example, Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5). The people disapproved, and said, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner" (v. 7). Does this not support the view that Jesus associated with sinners? But Zacchaeus said, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (v. 8). And it seems that

he was converted, since Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham" (v. 9). Then he added, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (v. 10). Therefore, this incident does not endorse association with sinners for any purpose, but only for spiritual ends. Jesus did not associate with sinners for social enjoyment, but "to seek and to save what was lost."

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

The wedding at Cana is often cited to support the assertion that Jesus participated in social activities even when there was no spiritual agenda (John 2). This is a gross misuse of the passage, because his purpose was not social but acutely spiritual. It is here that he worked his first miracle, manifested his glory, and instilled faith in his disciples: "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (v. 11). It was not a manifestation of his human and fun-loving side, but a manifestation of his divine and messianic glory by a display of supernatural power. The passage provides no justification for a lust for recreation or useless association with non-Christians. But there is no objection against a Christian who participates in social events or who associates with non-Christians if he consistently draws their attention to the glory of Christ.

There are additional examples, and the biblical pattern is that although Jesus associated with non-Christians, his purpose was not social or recreational, but spiritual. He demanded spiritual change from sinners, and he remained only with those who were willing to hear his teaching and to repent of their sins. He instructed his disciples to avoid endless association with sinners who refuse to accept the Christian faith: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces" (Matthew 7:6), and "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town" (Matthew 10:14). Sometimes persistence is not a sign of love, but only an excuse to remain in a relationship that Jesus has commanded the Christian to throw away.

Other relevant passages include:

But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they

shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. (Acts 13:50-51)

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

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

Many Christians have succumbed to the popular notion that when people of different worldviews and religions come together, there ought to be a free exchange of ideas, so that we may show respect for one another and learn from one another. However, this is unbiblical; instead, we are commanded to resist the non-Christians and to destroy their beliefs. Jesus and the apostles never had an exchange of ideas with non-Christians, because they believed in the final and exclusive truth of the Christian faith, and that it was to completely dominate. All their dealings with non-Christians were one-sided – they preached to the non-Christians, refuted their beliefs and traditions, and taught them the only truth.

We may have friendly conversations with non-Christians, but an *exchange* of ideas implies that we respect their beliefs, that some their beliefs might be true, that we might learn from them, and that we might even consider adopting their beliefs. However, for a Christian to suggest any of these things is treason against the kingdom of God. One who respects non-Christian beliefs and who thinks that some of them might be true is probably not a Christian in the first place. Just as Jesus has nothing to learn from the devil, Christians have nothing to learn from non-Christians (2 Corinthians 6:15).<sup>60</sup> He commanded us to *teach* the nations (Matthew 28:18-20), not to learn from them. Rather, we learn from God himself, who teaches us through the Scripture.

Even Christians often regard this high view of the Christian religion as arrogant. Of course, whether these people are genuine Christians is debatable, but in any case, the accusation is unintelligent, because it is a biblical teaching and not a private invention that the Christian faith alone is true. And biblical teaching is what defines the Christian religion. Thus because the Christian religion defines itself as exclusive, a view of the Christian religion that is not exclusive is in fact not the Christian religion. It is a mark of faith and obedience, not arrogance, to teach God's word as exclusive truth. It is

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<sup>60</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *The Light of Our Minds*.

tantamount to the position that only God is right, and that anyone who contradicts God is wrong. There is nothing more humble than this. On the other hand, it is more than arrogant to suggest that the Christian faith needs modification or improvement through an exchange of ideas with non-Christian worldviews – it is blasphemy. The offender should face church discipline for it, and if he is a minister, he should be removed from office.

Some may argue that although the Christian worldview requires no modification or improvement, a dialogue with non-Christians will nevertheless increase mutual understanding. This is fine as long as the Christian's motive for understanding the non-Christian viewpoint is to refute it. The purpose is to gain information in order to destroy their religions and philosophies, and not to develop respect or sympathy for them. We must never allow the non-Christians to think that we are prepared to accept their beliefs or to make the slightest adjustment to the Christian worldview.

Christians are to "demolish" all non-Christian ideas and "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Thus Scripture forbids us to respect or learn from non-Christian worldviews and religions. It condemns all non-biblical worldview and religions, and to suggest even for a second that we have one iota of respect for non-biblical beliefs is spiritual treason. We must continuously declare our disdain for any thought that "sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Unless we are truly willing to consider non-biblical ideas, in which case we are non-Christians, it is dishonest to allow others to think that we are open and respectful to their beliefs.

In any case, those who associate with non-Christians on the basis that Jesus did it distort the biblical account. Jesus indeed associated with sinners, but at least according to the biblical record, he did it only for spiritual purposes, and he always produced concrete actions to achieve these purposes when he interacted with sinners. If those Christians who wish to associate with sinners consistently follow this model, then there is no objection. If they do not, then they are only deceiving themselves and others, abusing the example of Jesus to justify their own lusts for non-Christian company.

Of course, "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19), so that to function in human society will entail interaction with non-Christians. Paul admits that it is unavoidable (1 Corinthians 5:10).<sup>61</sup> Necessary relations aside, the issue is whether we should associate them on a personal level. Few Christians who befriend non-Christians on the basis that "Jesus did it" are effective in ministry to sinners, assuming that they have ministry in mind in the first place. Many of them are simply dishonest – they have no intention of demanding conversion from the non-Christians. To repeat Paul's admonition, "*Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'*" (1 Corinthians 15:33). That is, we should not be so deceived as to think that it makes little difference with whom we associate. It is foolish to assume that no tragedy will befall those who enjoy the company of non-Christians.

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<sup>61</sup> Paul says that we must interact with non-Christians because this is unavoidable – sinners are everywhere – but he does not say that it is a desirable thing in itself. As for those who claim to be Christians but who practice immorality such as idolatry and fornication, the verse teaches that we are to shun them entirely.

Other relevant passages include:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Bible also instructs us concerning relationships among Christians. Although we are no longer dealing with non-Christians, so that there are not as many restrictions, and that even intimate and permanent bonds are possible, it remains that the main purpose and content in these relationships among Christians ought to be spiritual, dominated by prayer, worship, and theological discussions.

Some relevant biblical passages include:

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

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

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

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

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

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the

wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not. (Malachi 3:16-18)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whereas Christians have nothing to learn from non-Christians, it is profitable to interact with faithful believers in order to develop in biblical knowledge and in holiness. True Christians enjoy this kind of fellowship in which God remains the center of our thoughts

and conversations, even during social and recreational activities. Therefore, although Christians may freely befriend other believers, it remains that their priorities consist of spiritual and theological concerns.

This concludes our overview of the divine attributes, and we now proceed to the final section of this chapter, which is a discussion on the works of God.

## **THE WORKS OF GOD**

Although the Bible presents us with a transcendent God, it also teaches us that he is directly involved with the universe and humanity, beginning with its doctrine on the CREATION of the universe. Genesis 1 and 2 contain the historical account about God's creation of the earth, the stars, the seasons, plant life, and all kinds of animals. The crown of his creation is man, whom he made in his own image.

God created the universe *ex nihilo*, or "out of nothing." There were no preexisting materials out of which God created the universe, but he created all things by his omnipotence:

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

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

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

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

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,<sup>62</sup> whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. (Colossians 1:16)

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. (Hebrews 11:3)

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<sup>62</sup> God's creation includes "invisible" things, such as angels and the spiritual realm.



You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being. (Revelation 4:11)

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

God does not leave the universe to exist on its own, and indeed it cannot exist on its own, but he continuously sustains its existence and directly causes all its events. It is unbiblical to say that God created the universe with certain laws that govern its operation. Rather, the biblical teaching is that God holds the universe together, and controls even the most minute event within it. In other words, the whole universe is ruled by a divine mind instead of natural laws and powers. This entails the rejection of all theories that ascribe control of human lives and world events to impersonal forces, so that astrology, karma, and so forth are denied. Also excluded are all scientific and natural laws.

This is the doctrine of the PROVIDENCE of God. Theologians distinguish between GENERAL PROVIDENCE and SPECIAL PROVIDENCE. General providence, also called ordinary providence, refers to God's regular causation of events, including the thoughts and actions of men. This is often falsely attributed to natural laws and forces. Special providence, also called extraordinary providence, refers to God's irregular causation of events, as he deviates from the usual pattern that he exhibits under ordinary providence. God's general providence and special providence together embrace every event that occurs.

Paul writes that God the Father, through God the Son, created not only all things "visible and invisible," but that the Son "is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Jesus Christ is before all creation, and he holds together the universe. God created the universe by his word, and even now he is "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:3). Acts 17:28 says, "For in him we live and move and have our being." God created all things, and only God is uncreated. And only God is self-existing and self-sustaining, so that all things continue to exist only because he sustains them. Since all things are dependent on God's continuous sustenance, no creature possesses autonomy. God controls and sustains all things. There is no freedom from him in any sense and in any degree.

God causes every event in creation. Even seemingly insignificant events cannot occur apart from his will (Matthew 10:29). Many biblical passages declare his exhaustive control over creation:

So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt....You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to

accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.  
(Genesis 45:8, 50:20)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything

else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. (Acts 17:25-26)

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

The fact that God exercises such extreme control over all of creation is disturbing to many people, including some who claim to be Christians. Therefore, they attempt to distort the Scripture to support a false theology that allows them to maintain a sense of freedom and dignity, which they treasure above the truth and honor of God. But it is wicked to seek freedom from God. Those who love God are happy that he possesses absolute control over all things. They say with Isaiah 33:22, "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us," and they would not have it any other way. They are bold to say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!" (Psalm 96:10).

Although God directly controls and causes all things, sometimes his involvement is especially evident, as when he deviates from his usual pattern. These instances are often called divine interventions. Although this is understandable, it could also mislead since it seems to suggest that God has little to do with the regular pattern of events, whereas even the regular pattern is caused by God just as much as the special events that deviate from it. These special events are sometimes called signs, wonders, and miracles. The Bible presents to us a God who does unusual and spectacular things:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Bible authorizes all Christians to witness to Jesus Christ through the preaching of the gospel accompanied by miraculous signs:

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

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

Christianity's opponents reject the supernaturalism of Scripture, and often deny the very possibility of miracles. Now, every argument proceeds from a worldview and not from a vacuum. Based on what theories of epistemology and metaphysics do our opponents formulate their arguments against biblical miracles? And can they defend these theories? They cannot come from the biblical worldview itself, because the biblical worldview endorses miracles. Since the Christian faith is a *true* worldview, since it is the *only* true worldview, since it is true in its *entirety*, and since it can refute all non-Christian worldviews,<sup>63</sup> this means that every argument that presupposes another worldview is without justification, and every claim that contradicts any biblical proposition must be false. And since the entire Bible is true, its teachings about creation and providence are also true.

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<sup>63</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions and Presuppositional Confrontations*.

## **4. MAN**

Jesus Christ is the creator of man, and precedes man in preeminence. From this perspective it appears that the doctrine of Christ deserves prior attention to the doctrine of man. However, Christ took up the nature of a man in the incarnation, and since the work of Christ permeates the study of Christ, and it was for human beings – that is, the chosen ones – that he performed the work of atonement, it is reasonable to first consider the doctrine of man. An understanding of biblical anthropology will facilitate our understanding of christology. Therefore, the doctrine of man is placed immediately after the doctrine of God in this course of study.

### **THE CREATION OF MAN**

God created man after he created the earth, plant life, and the animals. He created the former things simply by commanding them into being. For example, in Genesis 1:3, he says, "Let there be light," and in verse 11 he says, "Let the earth produce vegetation." As for the creation of man, Genesis records what seems to be a conference between the members of the Trinity, who agreed to create man in the image of God: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (1:26). Even without the rest of the passage (v. 26-30), this is sufficient to suggest a more intimate relationship between God and man, and that special care was given to his creation.

Perhaps the most popular contemporary objection against the Genesis account is the theory of evolution. It denies God's direct creation of man, and proposes that life originated from non-life, and that man is the product of mutations from lower species. This contradicts what Scripture teaches about man's origin. Genesis 2:7, 21-22 recount the creation of man as follows:

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being....So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

God created the man before the woman, and because the man already existed at the creation of the woman, God took materials from the man to create the woman. However, when God created the man, he did not use materials from the animals that he had already made; rather, he went directly to "the dust of the ground" and then directly "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Therefore, the Bible teaches that God created man by direct action, and not by a process of biological evolution. There are other details in

Genesis 1-2 that could reinforce the doctrine,<sup>1</sup> but this is sufficient to show that the theory of evolution contradicts biblical revelation.

Now, the Bible itself claims that all of the Bible is divine revelation (2 Timothy 3:16), and so it speaks with one authority. This being so, to reject any part of the Bible is to reject that authority. In other words, since the Bible itself claims that every part of the Bible is inspired by God, the rejection of any proposition in the Bible entails the rejection of the Bible's claim about itself, that all of it is inspired by God.

Since the Bible itself claims that every part of the Bible is true, to judge any part of it as false requires an appeal to a standard or authority that is foreign to the Bible. If a person rejects the Bible's claim about itself, that it is inspired and infallible, when he judges that one of its propositions is false, then he cannot accept the Bible's claim about itself when he judges that another one of its propositions is true. That is, if a person appeals to a non-biblical standard or authority to reject one biblical proposition, then he must continue to appeal to a non-biblical standard or authority when he agrees with another biblical proposition.

To illustrate, since the Bible affirms the deity of Christ, a person who rejects the deity of Christ can do so only if he assumes a non-biblical standard or authority by which he judges that the Bible is false. But then, if this same person agrees with the biblical teaching that murder is immoral, he cannot do so just because the Bible teaches that murder is immoral. Instead, he must again appeal to a non-biblical standard or authority to justify his belief that murder is immoral. Since he rejects the Bible's authority to justify its own claims when he rejects its teaching about the deity of Christ, he cannot now appeal to the Bible's authority to justify its own claims when he affirms that murder is wrong. However, if the non-biblical standard or authority to which he appeals is itself unjustifiable – and our position is that every non-biblical standard or authority is unjustifiable<sup>2</sup> – then he can justify neither his rejection of the deity of Christ nor his affirmation that murder is wrong.

If a person accepts one part of the Bible and rejects another part of the Bible by a standard or authority that is foreign to the Bible, then to him, the part of the Bible that he accepts is not true because the Bible says so, but because that standard or authority to which he submits tells him so. Therefore, he cannot justify his belief in the part of the Bible that he accepts because the Bible says it, but he must justify this belief by the epistemological standard or authority by which he evaluates the Bible. However, if this epistemology itself lacks justification, then his verdict on any part of the Bible also lacks justification, and what he says is worthless.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, to understand the Hebrew word translated "day" in Genesis 1 as indicating a twenty-four hour period would rule out the theory of evolution, which claims that human life took many years to come about.

<sup>2</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Captive to Reason, and The Light of Our Minds*.



Therefore, a person who rejects one part of the Bible cannot claim to accept another part of the Bible on the basis that the second part is the revelation of God, since he has appealed to another standard or authority to judge that the first part is not the revelation of God. Likewise, to accept any one of the Bible's propositions because it is a part of the Bible obligates a person to accept the entire Bible as true, because the authority behind the Bible is one and not many.

Again, a person who rejects even one biblical proposition can only do so because he trusts a non-biblical standard or authority. Thus he cannot then appeal to divine authority or biblical revelation to sustain his other beliefs. However, if only divine authority or biblical revelation can justify any proposition or sustain any belief, then this person who trusts in a non-biblical standard or authority has lost justification for all the things that he affirms. The Bible claims that it is ultimate and infallible, and this applies to all its propositions, so that a person who rejects any part of the Bible must reject all of the Bible, and a person who accepts any part of the Bible must accept all of the Bible.

In our context, this means that a person who rejects the biblical account of the direct creation of man cannot at the same time affirm the creation of the universe by God on the basis of Scripture. If a person accepts the creation of the universe by God because the Scripture teaches it, then he must also affirm the direct creation of man by God because the Scripture teaches it. This is an essential principle. Once a person rejects any part of the Bible, the whole Bible is taken away from him.

Now, the theory of evolution deals with what became of preexisting materials. Since no evolution could have taken place if there was nothing to evolve, the theory of evolution presupposes the existence of the universe. Biology presupposes cosmology. And both biology and cosmology presuppose the possibility of knowledge, or epistemology. Thus epistemology comes before cosmology, and cosmology comes before biology.

It has been established that evolutionary biology is a non-biblical biology – it is a rejection of biblical biology. And it has been also established that a person cannot reject one part of the biblical worldview and then accept another part of the biblical worldview. Thus a non-biblical biology presupposes a non-biblical cosmology, and a non-biblical cosmology presupposes a non-biblical epistemology. However, if all non-biblical theories of epistemology are demonstrably false, then all non-biblical theories of cosmology are destroyed. If all non-biblical theories of cosmology are destroyed, then all non-biblical theories of biology are also destroyed, and this includes the theory of evolution.

The theory of evolution presupposes a non-biblical epistemology, and this results in the destruction of the entire worldview. But to presuppose a biblical epistemology in which the infallibility of the Bible is affirmed rules out the theory of evolution from the start. Therefore, whereas biblical biology, which affirms the direct creation of man by God, is affirmed as a valid implication of divine inspiration, it is impossible for evolutionary biology to be true.

In the context of debate, we may temporarily assume the presuppositions of science for the sake of argument, and from that basis argue that evolution is "a theory in crisis" and that "the fossils still say *No*."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, since science is fallacious and false, it cannot obtain any knowledge about reality. Thus scientific arguments against evolution are weaker than the biblical argument against evolution. This is not because the scientific case against evolution is weak, but because science itself is unable to discover any truth. An argument that destroys the non-Christian's entire worldview at the starting point is certainly superior.

To summarize:

1. One must either accept or reject the whole biblical worldview, and not only a part of it.
2. The theory of evolution contradicts the biblical worldview.
3. Therefore, the evolutionist cannot borrow any premise from the biblical worldview.
4. The universe must first exist for life to exist in it (or to evolve from it).
5. Therefore, any theory of biology presupposes a theory of cosmology.
6. Knowledge must be possible before a theory of cosmology can be formulated.
7. Therefore, any theory of cosmology presupposes a theory of epistemology.
8. Only biblical epistemology is true and justified.<sup>4</sup>
9. Therefore, only the biblical worldview is true and justified, and thus only biblical cosmology is true and justified, and thus only biblical biology is true and justified.
10. Biblical biology affirms the direct creation of man by God.
11. Therefore, the doctrine that God made man by direct creation is true, and the theory of evolution is false.

The evolutionist must tell me how a non-Christian can know *anything* before he presents his theories on cosmology and biology. Since he cannot find an epistemology to support his cosmology, and since he cannot find a cosmology to support his biology, he has no universe in his worldview to allow his biology to be true. His biology can exist only in his imaginary world, and it is just as much a fantasy as his universe. Thus he does not even have the right to present his case on the theory of evolution unless I choose to hear it.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*; Adler & Adler Publishers, 1997; Duane T. Gish, *Evolution: The Fossils Still Say No!*; Institute for Creation Research, 1985. Also see Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*; Touchstone Books, 1998; William Dembski, *No Free Lunch: Why Specified Complexity Cannot be Purchased Without Intelligence*; Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Captive to Reason, and The Light of Our Minds*.

Life does not exist in a vacuum. We cannot just agree that the universe exists and argue only about biology, because the kind of universe assumed determines what is possible within it. If non-Christian epistemology is impossible, then non-Christian cosmology is impossible, and if non-Christian cosmology is impossible, then non-Christian biology is impossible. However, once we accept a Christian epistemology, and thus a Christian cosmology, then the direct creation of man by God follows by necessity, and all non-Christian theories of biology are ruled out.

This is one way to apply the presuppositional argument against the theory of evolution. The power of the presuppositional argument is such that it establishes the Christian faith as true, and simultaneously refutes all non-Christian ideas. Since the presuppositional argument establishes that all of Scripture is true, and since the theory of evolution contradicts Scripture, the theory of evolution is false. That is, the Bible is right, and evolution contradicts the Bible; therefore, evolution is wrong.

We proceed with the understanding that God made man by a direct act of power through which he was created complete. There was no evolution. God created the universe, and apart from any process, he directly formed man's body with the materials from the earth, and not from the animals. Then, God imparted life into him, again by a direct act of power, and man became a living and thinking person: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

As for the purpose of man's creation, the Bible teaches that man was created by the will of God for the glory of God:

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and *by your will* they were created and have their being. (Revelation 4:11)

I will say to the north, "Give them up!" and to the south, "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created *for my glory*, whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:6-7)

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be *for the praise of his glory*. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will *gain glory for myself* through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD. (Exodus 14:4)

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared

for destruction? What if he did this *to make the riches of his glory known* to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:22-24)

Some people suggest that God's nature of love compelled him to create objects of affection to satisfy a need in him to express himself in fellowship, generosity, and sacrifice. However, it is heretical to say that God needs anything. As Paul says in Acts 17:25, "And he is not served by human hands, *as if he needed anything*, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." God is eternally self-existent, and therefore also self-sufficient. Since man is not eternal, but has a time of origin before which he did not exist, and since "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8), if ever God could exist without man, he could have continued to exist without man forever. Therefore, the creation of man was not due to any need in God. Moreover, even before the creation of man, God had already created the angels, and before that, the members of the Trinity loved one another. Even if love needs expression, God still did not need to create man.

Rather, as the above passages indicate, God created the elect and the reprobates because he willed to manifest himself and to be glorified through them. Although the reprobates do not consciously glorify God, he glorifies himself through them by what he causes them to do and what he does with them. He is glorified by the elect in their salvation and by the reprobates in their damnation.

This leads us to consider the order of the eternal decrees. If the items in God's plan were to be set forth in the order in which he decided them, what would this order be? Of course, God is eternal and omniscient, so that there is not a point in his thinking when he does not know everything or when he has not decided everything; therefore, when we speak of order in the mind of God, we are referring to logical order and not chronological order.

The decree for God to be glorified comes first, and to achieve this, the decree is made that Christ would subdue all things and deliver them to be Father. In order to achieve this, the decree is made that Christ would save a chosen people out of fallen humanity to become his fellow heirs. In order to achieve this, the decree is made that fallen humanity would be divided into the elect and the reprobates. In order to achieve this, the decree is made that humanity would fall into sin. Then, in order to achieve this, the decree is made that God would create humanity. This is the order of purpose and design. The order is reversed in execution, so that it begins with creation and culminates in God's glory.

We can illustrate this with an analogy from human life. Suppose my purpose is to arrive at the office. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should drive my car toward that location. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should get into my car. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should get out of my house. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should get dressed. In order to achieve this, the decision is made that I should get out of bed. The final purpose comes first in the

order of decisions, and the first thing that I must do in order to achieve this purpose comes last in the order. The order is reversed in execution, so that the last item in the order of purpose and design now becomes the first item. Thus I must first get out of bed, and then get dressed, and then get out of my house, and so on. The final result is that I arrive at the office, and my purpose is accomplished.

The nature of purpose and design necessitates a supralapsarian scheme of the eternal decrees, in which the decree of election and reprobation appears before the decree for the fall of humanity, and in which the decree for the fall of humanity appears before the decree for the creation of humanity. The infralapsarian scheme places the decree of election and reprobation after the decree for the fall of humanity. One reason for this is to arrange the decrees so that the decree for reprobation applies to actual sinners, whereas the supralapsarian would say that God decrees the fall of humanity so that he would accomplish the decree of reprobation.

Supralapsarianism is the biblical and rational order. Infralapsarianism confuses logical conception with historical execution, so that not only is it contrary to fact, but it makes nonsense of some of the divine decrees. For any given decree, it leaves the purpose of the decree unspecified until the next decree. But then there is no reason for the present one, so that it becomes arbitrary. Thus infralapsarianism is blasphemous by implication, since it insults God's intelligence and denies his rationality.

Infralapsarians retort that supralapsarianism undermines God's justice, but to assert this they smuggle in a private and unbiblical standard of justice, one that rejects God's absolute sovereignty and violates strict logical inference, and then evaluate the eternal decrees by it. Their attempt to defend God's subservience to a human standard of justice turns out to be a subversion against his sovereign and divine justice, and a denial of even a simple ability for logical planning and arrangement in the mind of God. Hence their objection commits another act of blasphemy.

Louis Berkhof, in explaining some of the objections against supralapsarianism, writes, "Notwithstanding its seeming pretensions, it does not give a solution of the problem of sin. It would do this, if it dared to say that God decreed to bring sin into the world *by His own direct efficiency*."<sup>5</sup> But I dare say this. In fact, I dare not deny it, because if I do, I would be saying that some other power has the ability to generate and control sin by its own "direct efficiency." Handing over divine power to humans and demons, this is the blasphemy of dualism.

Berkhof continues, "Some Supralapsarians, it is true, do represent the decree as the efficient cause of sin, but yet do not want this to be interpreted in such a way that God becomes the author of sin."<sup>6</sup> But I do affirm that God is the sovereign and righteous author of sin, for the same reason that I just stated. To deny that God is the author of sin necessarily implies some form of dualism, and this amounts to a rejection of biblical theism. The result, again, is blasphemy.

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<sup>5</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2003), p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

But Berkhof persists: "It is pointed out that the supralapsarian scheme is illogical in that it makes the decree of election and preterition refer to non-entities, that is, to men who do not exist, except as bare possibilities, even in the mind of God; who do not yet exist in the divine decree and are therefore not contemplated as created, but only as creatable."<sup>7</sup> This is a perplexingly stupid objection. In a logical arrangement, the final purpose is first conceived, and then each succeeding decree is made to accomplish the one that comes before. Thus of course the decree that concerns the creation of men would be preceded by a decree that requires the creation of men to accomplish but still represents men as bare possibilities. A woman can decide to put on a beautiful dress for her high school reunion before she buys the dress. In fact, it is because she decides to wear a beautiful dress to the reunion that she then decides to buy one.

Infralapsarianism confuses the order of purpose and design with the order of execution. It complains that in supralapsarianism, God decrees the identities of the reprobates without a view to their sinfulness. However, the Bible explicitly asserts this view, that reprobation is unconditional, and that God created some people for salvation and all others for damnation "out of the same lump" (Romans 9:21). The reprobates did not create themselves; God created them, and created them as reprobates.

Under infralapsarianism, since the decree of election and reprobation comes after the decree for the fall of humanity, this means that at the point when God decrees the fall of humanity, he does so without knowing why he decrees it or what he would do about it. If he has redemption in mind, and thus the distinction between the saved and the damned, so that he knows why he is decreeing the fall of humanity, then at that point he has already decided on redemption, and thus this becomes supralapsarianism. This means that under infralapsarianism, at the point when God decrees the fall of humanity, he does it just so he wishes humanity to fall.

Infralapsarians hide behind their human standard of justice, that God must designate as reprobates only those who are already guilty, but is it better for God to decree that all of humanity should fall into sin without any reason for it and without any thought of redemption? On the other hand, although supralapsarians would say that God could indeed decree the fall of humanity just because he wishes it, in their scheme, God decrees the fall of humanity so that there would be sinners for him to save and to damn.

The major objection against the supralapsarian scheme amounts to an opposition to the idea that God could designate the identities of the reprobates before he decrees their fall into sin. In supralapsarianism, God first decrees that there would be reprobates, and then he decrees the fall *so that* these reprobates could materialize. Again, the objection is against unconditional reprobation. To put it another way, the objection is against God's absolute sovereignty, or the fact that God is God.

Then, the objection against unconditional reprobation is that it is unjust – that is, not according to any standard stated in Scripture, but according to man's sinful intuition. He

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

is uncomfortable with the idea! In any case, by the time God *executes* punishment upon the reprobates, they have already fallen into sin, so that God does not in fact punish anyone who is sinless and innocent, that is, except when he caused the suffering of Christ. Even then, the punishment inflicted was just in God's mind because Christ was bearing the guilt of the chosen ones (Isaiah 53:10).

Again, the objection against supralapsarianism really amounts to a denial that God is God, and that he is not a man or a mere creature. Some people say they believe in God, but they do not in fact believe. This is a major culprit behind false theological systems such as Liberalism, Arminianism, and inconsistent Calvinism. There is in fact no biblical or rational objection against supralapsarianism. People simply do not wish to allow God total sovereignty over his own creation. Once we abandon false and man-centered assumptions, the offense of absolute divine sovereignty vanishes. Whether we will abandon these assumptions is another question. The work of the Spirit in sanctification is needed for us to relinquish all sense of human autonomy and man-centered thinking, including the relative and illusory type of "freedom" that appears so frequently in the popular form of Calvinism.

As with many such controversies, the real question in this disagreement between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism is whether we are willing to "let" God be God *on his own terms*.<sup>8</sup> A consistent supralapsarianism is the only position that honors God, Scripture, and logic. And it is the only God-centered position. One of the things that we learn from the doctrine is that God actively decreed and caused the fall of humanity as one of the steps by which he would fulfill his eternal plan. Sin was not an accident, and redemption was not a mere reaction on the part of God. As the Scripture says, "The LORD works out *everything* for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster" (Proverbs 16:4). Thus supralapsarianism results in praise and reverence toward God.

## **THE NATURE OF MAN**

According to the Bible, God made man in his own image: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him" (Genesis 1:27). Whatever is meant by the image of God, it cannot refer to something that God himself does not possess. Since God is incorporeal, since he is spirit and has no form, his image must be unrelated to man's body. Nevertheless, because some people assert otherwise, we will address the issue. In what way is man like God? What constitutes man's point of contact with God? And in what way is man superior to the animals?

If the image of God is in man's body, or if the image includes the physical aspect of man, then it is arguable that some animals also bear this image, since the physical differences between man and some animals are not so vast as to say that one is made in the image of God and the other not.<sup>9</sup> But this is unacceptable because Scripture indicates that it is the image of God that distinguishes man from the animals.

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<sup>8</sup> Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Commentary on Ephesians, The Author of Sin, and Blasphemy and Mystery*. Also, Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998), p. 479-502.

<sup>9</sup> Similarities between the human body and that of the animals imply common design, not common descent.

Deuteronomy 4:15-18 says that God has "no form," and therefore it is unlawful to make any idol or image to represent God, even if it is in the appearance of a human person:

You saw *no form of any kind* the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, *whether formed like a man or a woman*, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below.

This passage establishes that anything with a physical form or appearance cannot be the image of God. Since God himself has "no form," the body or the physical aspect of man cannot be the image of God. In fact, the idea that the body can be part of the image of God goes against the whole point of this passage. And since this passage is a denunciation of idolatry, to say that the image of God includes the body is to teach idolatry. It is an attack on the nature of God, and anyone who affirms it should face church discipline for heresy.

The Bible teaches that the image of God is defined in terms of the intellect. Although man has some advantages as an upright biped with opposable thumbs, the bodies of many animals are superior in various ways. Some are stronger, some are faster. Some can survive severe weathers. When it comes to reproduction, many are more prolific. Some can breathe in water. Of course, some of them can even fly. However, all the animals combined cannot compare to man in intellectual abilities.

Animals cannot understand syllogisms and algebraic equations. If they sometimes seem to perform tasks that require thinking or design, such as building elaborate nests or navigating complex routes, we discover that their creativity and ability to adapt are limited, and that they are able to do these things only by instinct, and not by deliberate and rational thought. Their skills are innate – God built into them what they need to survive. So birds cannot teach cats how to make nests, and spiders cannot teach elephants how to play dead when attacked. The most important difference is that animals cannot perform theological reflections. The fact that God made man in his own image means that man is a rational mind, whose chief purpose is to fellowship with God and to worship him.

Man's rational mind is the likeness of God and his point of contact with God. His intellectual qualities are evident from the beginning of Genesis. God blessed him in Genesis 1:28-30, and gave him dominion over nature by a verbal pronouncement that he understood. Adam cared for Eden not by instinct, but in obedience to God's verbal instructions. God gave man a moral command in Genesis 2:16, forbidding him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but allowed him to eat from all the other trees. Man was warned that to violate this command would result in his death. Only a rational mind can understand concepts such as duty, sin, and death.



The Bible explicitly distinguishes man from the animals on the basis of his intellectual powers:

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*, and the man became a living being....But it is the spirit in a man, *the breath of the Almighty*, that *gives him understanding*. (Genesis 2:7, Job 32:8)

[God] *teaches more to us* than to the beasts of the earth and *makes us wiser* than the birds of the air. (Job 35:11)

God did not endow [the ostrich] with *wisdom* or give her a share of *good sense*. (Job 39:17)

*Do not be like the horse or the mule*, which have *no understanding* but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. (Psalm 32:9)

The new self...is being renewed *in knowledge in the image* of its Creator. (Colossians 3:10)

The mind of man, his intelligence or rationality, is the image of God. It is impossible to deny this, but some people attempt to add other elements to it, such as morality and dominion. This is, in fact, consistent the biblical position (Ephesians 4:24); however, rationality remains the basic element in the definition of the image of God.

Man's moral nature distinguishes him from the animals, and so it seems that it is a part of the image of God. But what is the basis of this moral nature, and how does it operate? Even animals "obey" God's commands, but instead of doing so on the basis of understanding and volition, they are compelled by instinct. On the other hand, man receives and understands a divine command, and then decides to obey it or defy it. He can comprehend the concepts of good and evil, and he can discuss them by the use of language. This means that man is moral precisely because he is rational. Morality is a function of intelligence or rationality. Therefore, although to have a moral nature is part of what it means to be a human person, it is not necessary to include it as part of the basic definition for the image of God.

Man's dominion over the animals is also an extension or result of his intellectual superiority (Genesis 1:28-30). Dominion is a function of rationality. As James writes, "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are *being tamed* and *have been tamed* by man" (James 3:7). Although man is physically weaker than many animals, his understanding and knowledge enable him to devise methods, tools, and weapons to tame and exploit them. Man's rule over nature is made possible by his intelligence, and not by any supernatural or mystical power given by God.

The strong interest in animal rights<sup>10</sup> and vegetarianism will justify a brief digression at this point. The Bible teaches that humans are more valuable than animals and that humans may eat animals for food:

The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. (Genesis 9:2-3)

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

He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:11-12)

Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Luke 12:7)

Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! (Luke 12:24)

For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? (1 Corinthians 9:9)

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

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<sup>10</sup> A "right" is something to which one is entitled. Since God is the creator and owner of all things, only he has the authority to assign rights to his creatures. Humans and animals do not have intrinsic rights; only God has intrinsic rights. Humans and animals have rights only in the sense that Scripture commands that they should be treated in the manner it prescribes. Such rights only exist in relation to other creatures, because God is free to treat his creatures in any way he desires.

The Christian's priority is humans, not animals. Since the Bible teaches that humans possess superior value, we should allocate resources in a way that supports the cause of Christ among humans, even at the expense of the comfort and the survival of animals. Much of what is done in the name of animal rights takes from resources that should be used for humanity. This is a denial that man is made in the divine image, that he is special among God's creatures, and therefore it is a rejection of Scripture.

As for vegetarianism, God has granted humans permission to consume "everything that lives and moves" (Genesis 9:3). Scripture states that we are not restricted to eating plant life: "Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything" (v. 3). Therefore, to abstain from eating meat for spiritual reasons or as an acknowledgment of "animal rights" defies biblical teaching.

Although animal rights activists are in error, this does not mean that man may abuse and torture animals as he pleases. The Scripture instructs us on how we should treat them. For example, animals are to benefit from the Sabbath rest, and they must be allowed to eat while laboring (Deuteronomy 5:13-14, 25:4). Proverbs 12:10 says, "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal." Such passages suggest that it is wrong to torture animals for sport or to cause them any unjustified suffering. However, it remains that we may freely slaughter them for food, because Scripture grants that this is legitimate. Given the contemporary tendency to favor animals at the expense of men, we must make a special effort to prefer humans when thinking about the treatment of animals.

God always puts humans before the animals. After citing the biblical command that says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," Paul adds, "Is it about oxen that God is concerned?" (1 Corinthians 9:9). That is, even a command about the treatment of animals have the benefit of men in view: "Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest" (v. 10). Therefore, we should say with God, "Kill and eat!" (Acts 10:13).

Now, some who admit that the image of God is the intellect of man nevertheless argue that since the body is necessary to express our intelligence, whether in speech or in action, it must be at least a part of the image of God. But Deuteronomy 4:15-18 eliminates this possibility, and would condemn the suggestion as idolatry, blasphemy, and heresy. The body cannot be even a part of God's image. In addition, the argument confuses the image of God with the equipment that expresses it in the physical world. The mind can communicate with God without the body; we only need the body to interact with the physical world. Indeed, "to be away from the body" is to be "at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). The Bible regards the body as important, and it even says that the Christian's body is the temple of God (2 Corinthians 6:16); however, the body is not part of the image of God.

Another objection against equating the image of God with the intellect of man is rooted in the view that man is a TRICHOTOMY consisting of spirit, soul, and body. Proponents of this doctrine assert that the Bible portrays man as a trichotomy, and since "God is spirit"

(John 4:24), the image of God must therefore be man's spirit and not his soul or body. This being so, the image of God is not the intellect of man, but it is a non-intellectual part of man called the "spirit." The problem with this view is that the Bible does not endorse trichotomy, but instead teaches that man is a DICHOTOMY consisting of soul and body.

Trichotomists cite Hebrews 4:12 to support their view, but a proper reading renders their position impossible. The verse says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The trichotomists claim that although it is difficult to distinguish between the soul and the spirit, this verse says that they can be divided by the word of God. Therefore, the soul and the spirit are two different parts of a person.

However, the verse does not say that the word of God can divide the "soul and spirit and body," but that it can divide "soul and spirit, joints and marrow." Since both "joints and marrow" belong to the body, or the corporeal part of man, the natural interpretation is that "soul and spirit" also belong to the same part of a person, or the incorporeal part of man. If X = soul, Y = spirit, and Z = body, then the trichotomist understanding of this verse will make it say, "dividing X and Y, Z and Z," which produces an awkwardness that is absent in the dichotomist interpretation. Dichotomists understand that soul = spirit, and therefore X = Y. Thus, the verse reads, "dividing X and X, Z and Z," which preserves the symmetry intended by the biblical author.

Robert Reymond provides a grammatical argument, and writes:

Here the trichotomist insists, since the soul can be "divided" from the spirit, is evidence that they are two separate and distinct ontological entities. But this is to ignore the fact that "soul" and "spirit" are both genitives governed by the participle "dividing." The verse is saying that the Word of God "divides" the soul, *even* the spirit. But it does not say that the Word of God divides *between* soul and spirit...or divides the soul *from* the spirit.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the verse does not in fact refer to any dividing power in the word of God, but its ability to penetrate. The word of God is so powerful that it reaches, affects, and transforms even the deepest regions of a person's mind – that is, "it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (v. 12).<sup>12</sup> The next verse confirms this interpretation: "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (v. 13). The point is that nothing about us is hidden from God, not even our thoughts and intentions.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 421-422.

<sup>12</sup> "Attitudes" are just as mental or intellectual as "thoughts." Thus the symmetry of the verse extends to this latter part, so that if Q represents the intellect, the verse would read, "...dividing X and X, Z and Z; it judges the Q and Q of the heart." X and Q, then, would refer to the same part of man.

Another verse the trichotomists use is 1 Thessalonians 5:23, which says, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The three words translated "*spirit, soul and body*" are different Greek words. This is taken to mean that Paul refers to God's preservation of the "whole" man, which the apostle asserts to consist in three parts: spirit, soul, and body.

However, Mark 12:30 makes this interpretation impossible. Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." He mentions four items here with which we must love God, namely, the heart, soul, mind, and strength. If 1 Thessalonians 5:23 demands the understanding that man consists of *three* parts, then Mark 12:30 demands the understanding that man consists of *four* parts. Thus the trichotomist argument from 1 Thessalonians 5:23 fails.

Scripture uses repetition for emphasis. The fact that the above verses use different words to refer to man does not necessarily mean that each word designates a different part of man; rather, the intention is to refer to the whole person.

Popular Christian preaching often assumes a sharp distinction between the spirit and the soul, identifying the "heart" with the spirit, and the mind with the soul. However, the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* defines "heart" (Greek: *kardia*) as, "the inner person, the seat of understanding, knowledge, and will...."<sup>13</sup> *Kittel* contains a lengthy article on the word, and says, "The heart is the seat of understanding, the source of thought and reflection."<sup>14</sup> And as with other lexicons, it confirms that "The NT use of the word agrees with the OT use...."<sup>15</sup> The word "heart" includes a range of meanings in Scripture, but except when it is speaking of the physical organ, it refers to the mind, while the context stresses its particular functions.

Gordon Clark estimates that, "the term *heart* denotes emotion about ten or at the very most fifteen percent of the time. It denotes the will maybe thirty percent of the time; and it very clearly means the intellect sixty or seventy percent [of the time]."<sup>16</sup> Since both the emotion and the will are functions of the intellect, or the mind, except when it refers to the physical organ, the word "heart" means the mind in the Bible. On the basis of several pages of relevant passages, Clark concludes, "Therefore when someone in the pews hears the preacher contrasting the head and the heart, he will realize that the preacher either does not know or does not believe what the Bible says. That the gospel may be proclaimed in its purity and power, the churches should eliminate their Freudianism and other forms of contemporary psychology and return to God's Word...."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 2*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981; p. 250.

<sup>14</sup> Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 3*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999 (Original: 1965); p. 612.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 611.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *The Biblical Doctrine of Man*; Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1984; p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87-88.

It is unbiblical to distinguish between "head faith" and "heart faith" or "head knowledge" and "heart knowledge." In the first place, the mind of man is not his "head" or his brain. The mind is incorporeal, made in the image of God; it is not part of the body at all. Thus the contrast between the "head" and the "heart" errs on more than one level.

In any case, the trichotomist distinguishes between the spirit and the soul, or the heart and the mind. Therefore, the contrast is between faith in the spirit and faith in the mind, or knowledge in the spirit and knowledge in the mind. But since trichotomy is false, this contrast is also false. And since the words *spirit*, *soul*, *heart*, and *mind* all refer to the same incorporeal part of man, faith in the spirit is faith in the mind, and knowledge in the spirit is knowledge in the mind. They are different words for the same part of man. This also means that faith and knowledge are always intellectual.

In *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, and regarding the inclination and will of man, Jonathan Edwards writes, "the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart."<sup>18</sup> And in his lexicon, Thayer writes, "*kardia*...the soul or mind, as it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors...used of the understanding, the faculty and seat of the intelligence...."<sup>19</sup> The heart is intellectual.

On the basis of an extensive presentation of the evidence, Robert Morey concludes in his *Death and the Afterlife*:

Man's immaterial side is given several different names in Scripture. It has been called the "spirit," "soul," "mind," "heart," "inward parts," etc., of man. The names should not be viewed as referring to separate entities but as descriptions of different functions or relationships which man's immaterial side has....Indeed, spirit and soul are used interchangeably in various passages...<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, a human being consists of mind and body. The terms *spirit*, *soul*, *heart*, and *mind* are generally interchangeable:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the *body* but cannot kill the *soul*. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both *soul and body* in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

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<sup>18</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2000 (Original: 1834); p. 237.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002 (original: 1896); p. 325-326.

<sup>20</sup> Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*; Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1984; p. 65.

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates *body and spirit*, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

For it doesn't go into his *heart* but into his stomach, and then out of his *body*. (Mark 7:19)

In summary, the Bible teaches that man consists of two parts – the corporeal and the incorporeal: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our *outer man* is decaying, yet our *inner man* is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16, NASB). Man is a soul and a body. Strictly speaking, the soul is the actual human person, and the body is only a house for the soul, so that a man is a soul that lives in a body, and he remains a human person even without his body (2 Peter 1:13-14). The soul entered into man's body when God breathed life into it, and it is this breath of God that created man as a person and that gave him his intellectual powers. Thus the conclusion remains that the image of God is the intellect of man; that is, man is made in the image and likeness of God in the sense that man is a rational mind.

Genesis 1:27 says that God created male and female human beings: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." The verse indicates that both male and female are made in the image of God, and both belong to the category of man or mankind. The dominion that God gave to man belongs to both the male and the female, since verse 28 says, "God blessed *them* and said to *them*, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (v. 28).

The implication is that one gender is not intrinsically superior to the other. That said, although the ontological value of men and women are the same, God has imposed an authority structure upon them to define their roles within society, especially in marriage and church government.<sup>21</sup> In connection with this, we will examine several relevant passages below.

After the fall of mankind, God says to the woman, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16). One interpretation of this statement is that the woman will experience sexual desire for her husband, or at least a desire for his companionship. Reflecting this view, the Living Bible paraphrases the verse as, "You shall welcome your husband's affections, and he shall be your master." But this interpretation fails to relate the first clause of the sentence to the second. In addition, a similar statement appears in Genesis 4:7, but this time it is translated, "It desires to have you, but you must master it." Therefore, a proper understanding of this verse should read it as, "Your desire will be to *dominate* your husband, *but* he will rule over you."

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<sup>21</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Role Relationships of Men and Women*; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985. We will focus on the authority structure within marriage.

Some people assert that man and woman had equal authority in marriage before the Fall, and it was after mankind transgressed God's command that man was given rule over the woman as part of the curse upon humanity. According to this view, the subordination of the woman was only a result of sin, and it has been negated after the death and resurrection of Christ. This theory is attractive to those who wish to overturn the authority structure that God has prescribed, but there are obvious problems with it.

The resurrection of Christ has not immediately eliminated all the effects of the Fall. There are some things that must await the consummation of our salvation at his second coming. For example, sickness and death originated because of sin, and if the work of Christ has removed all the effects of sin for this stage of human history, then they should be completely absent from human experience, at least for the Christian. But Christians can still become ill and die today. Therefore, even if the subordination of women resulted from sin, it does not follow that it has been negated after the resurrection of Christ unless the Bible explicitly teaches it.

But in the first place, the authority of man over the woman did not originate because of the Fall. Even before God created the woman, he said that she would be the man's "helper" (Genesis 2:18). Paul teaches that the authority of the man over the woman did not originate because of sin, but that it is a creation ordinance. That is, the man has authority over the woman by the nature and order of creation:

For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. (1 Corinthians 11:8-9)

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. (1 Timothy 2:11-13)

Man was created to have authority over the woman, and the woman was created to submit to man's authority. This was established entirely apart from sin and the curse. And it is only natural that any ordinance of God instituted because of the very nature of creation remains in effect as long as we are human beings or until God explicitly declares otherwise.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, both Paul and Peter command Christian wives to obey their husbands, even non-Christian husbands. Thus the work of Christ and the apostolic teaching did nothing to abolish the authority structure instituted by God at creation, but rather reinforced it as an absolute moral law:

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<sup>22</sup> "While the male and female are equal in terms of their *being* or *nature*...the Scriptures also teach that they are not equal in terms of *function* or *office*. Man's headship did not arise because of the fall or as a result of Hebrew culture. Man was the head of the woman at creation as a direct institution of God Himself..."; Robert Morey, *Introduction to Defending the Faith*; Nevada: Christian Scholars Press, 2002; p. 34.



Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and *to be subject to their husbands*, so that no one will malign the word of God. (Titus 2:4-5)

Wives, in the same way *be submissive to your husbands* so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. (1 Peter 3:1-2)

The argument that the redemptive work of Christ removed the "curse" of the subordination of women within marriage is false. The Bible teaches that the husband has authority over the wife at the creation of man, after the fall of man, and after the work of Christ.

The fall and the curse did not establish the subordination of women – creation established that. Rather, Genesis 3:16 indicates that the fall and the curse produced the desire for women to usurp men's authority (v. 16a), and it declares that women's attempt will fail (v. 16b). This statement concerning their failure is not what instituted the authority structure, but it is only a declaration that the existing structure shall remain despite women's rebellion. Here is the curse: sinful women will continue to desire that which is against God and nature, but they will never attain it.

Christ removes the curse on women when he removes their desire to usurp the authority of men. When the work of Christ is applied to women by the power of the Holy Spirit, they learn to accept the authority of men as instituted by God at creation. There is no longer a demonic compulsion to rebel. Thus for women to submit to male leadership in the home and the church is a sign of righteousness and regeneration, and the rejection of male leadership in the home and the church is a manifestation of sin and wickedness, and the curse. Instead of abolishing male leadership in the home and the church, the work of Christ restored and reinforced the original divine design.

This also means that all teachings and arguments that oppose the authority of men in the home and the church, including those that attribute the subordination of women to the fall and the curse, are themselves effects of the fall and the curse. In other words, the doctrine that attributes women's subordination to the curse, and claims that this has been removed because of the work of Christ, is itself a manifestation of sin, rebellion, and the curse.

It would make a strange doctrine to say that people ought to worship idols because Christ has set them free from sin and the curse. No, the opposite is true. People worship idols because they are under the curse, and because they are possessed by sin and driven by the devil. When Christ sets them free, they cease their idol worship and turn to the true God instead. Likewise, women do not throw off men's authority because they are free from the curse, but because they are free from the curse, they are free from the sinful desire to

rebel, and they now gladly submit to men's authority according to God's original design and command.

The feminist movement and feminist theology strive to abolish the biblical structure of marriage and church government. In their efforts to promote an anti-biblical "equality," the feminists have facilitated the erosion of the most basic unit of society, the family. From the beginning, God has design that the man should be the head of the home, but sin has produced in the woman an urge to overturn God's command and the husband's authority, and to be "liberated" from them.

Just as Satan deceived Eve into disobedience by suggesting that God placed an untruthful and unreasonable restriction on her (Genesis 3:4-5), now he deceives women into thinking that happiness is realized through rebellion. Satan certainly has a low opinion of women's intelligence to think that they could be deceived again by the same simple trick. In any case, Christ is the hope of humanity, and obedience to God is happiness.<sup>23</sup> This is the simple truth. Which one will women believe?

Man's leadership in the family has been a controversial topic, both within and without theological circles. The reason for much of the debate is not because Scripture is unclear on the topic, but because of the ideological climate of the day and the sinful tendency of people to resent authority. As *Keil & Delitzsch* says in relation to Genesis 3:16, the woman's desire to defy man's authority is one that is "bordering upon disease."<sup>24</sup>

We have already cited part of 1 Peter 3:1-6. Verses 1-4 say:

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

Wives must submit to their husbands even if the men are non-Christians, and who lack the intelligence and character that comes with faith in Jesus Christ. Since the Bible also teaches that Christian women may marry only Christian men (1 Corinthians 7:39), and vice versa, Peter is addressing women who have become Christians after they were married.

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<sup>23</sup> "Since marriage and the family belong to God, we must follow the structure of marriage which God instituted in the Garden. Adam was the head of the family and Eve was submissive to his headship. This structure is what 'ought' to be in every marriage. Thus the Women's Liberation Movement is in open violation of God's creation ordinance of marriage when it denies the man's headship over the woman"; *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 1*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001; p. 64.

Submission is introduced when Peter says that some men might be "won over without words." This does not mean that a person can come to faith in Christ without the gospel message. It is popular to assert that "actions speak louder than words," but we have refuted this at the beginning of this book. Many people who have been indoctrinated by non-Christian thought, and who are too afraid or unfaithful to preach the gospel, claim that they witness to Christ by their lives, not by their words. But this is just an excuse to disobey. Christ commanded us to preach the gospel and to teach the nations – to talk about him. Indeed, if we live like Christians, we would also talk about him.

Peter is referring to husbands who have already heard the gospel but have not accepted it. He writes, "If any of them do not believe the word," *then* "they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives." This assumes that the word has already been preached to them, and this is why we know that they do not believe the word. Peter is telling the wives that God may still use their "purity and reverence" to impress their husbands, so that they will come to believe the gospel that they have heard. Therefore, the passage does not deny the necessity of preaching, but rather presupposes it.

Peter continues in verses 5-6:

For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

How did the women make themselves beautiful? "They were submissive to their own husbands." Although Sarah was "a very beautiful woman" (Genesis 12:14) in terms of appearance, Peter cites her case as an example of achieving inner beauty through submission and obedience. Being physically attractive is not enough – Sarah attained true beauty because she "obeyed Abraham and called him her master."

Just as Christians become the children of Abraham by imitating his faith (Galatians 3:7), women become the daughters of Sarah by imitating her obedience to her husband. Peter realizes that there are abusive husbands, but he says, "You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear" (v. 6). The wickedness of some husbands does not excuse the wives from following God's precepts. The biblical instruction is to "do what is right and do not give way to fear" in the context of submission and obedience toward one's husband, so that "if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (v. 1-2).

Another passage on the subject is Ephesians 5:22-24. It says:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body,

of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

The meaning is clear, but many commentators have attempted to subvert it. For example, New Testament scholar Walter L. Liefeld writes:

To submit meant to yield one's own rights. If the relationship called for it, as in the military, the term could connote obedience, but that meaning is not called for here. In fact, the word "obey" does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives, though it does with respect to children (6:1) and slaves (6:5).<sup>25</sup>

He admits that the word translated "submit" can mean obedience if the relationship described calls for it, but he says that the marriage relationship does not call for this meaning. Let us consider this claim.

Paul writes, "Wives, submit to your husbands *as to the Lord*" (v. 22), and "*as the church submits to Christ*, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (v. 24). Wives must submit to their husbands as the church must submit to Christ, and Liefeld asserts that the submission of the wives does not include obedience. But if this is true, then neither does the submission of the church include obedience. Therefore, according to Liefeld, wives do not need to obey their husbands and the church does not need to obey Christ, but a person must obey his superiors in the military. What does this mean? It means that Liefeld blasphemes the Lord Jesus Christ, and preaches rebellion to his people.

Instead of assuming that submission does not include obedience, we should allow the biblical teaching concerning Christ's absolute authority over the church to dictate the meaning of submission. The fact that the church must obey Christ is the established and nonnegotiable point by which other details in the passages are to be interpreted. And since the church's submission toward Christ necessarily includes obedience, wives are also to render obedience to their husbands "in everything."

Defining "to submit" as "to yield one's own rights" is problematic in the first place. Since the passage also applies "to submit" to our relationship with Christ, this definition implies that we have a right to defy the Lord – otherwise there would be nothing relevant to surrender – only that we are to surrender this right. But since other biblical passages deny that we have a right to defy him, the definition is false.<sup>26</sup>

These blunders reflect inferior scholarship, a heretical mindset, and a blasphemous attitude toward God and Scripture. However, Liefeld's errors do not stop here, since his

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<sup>25</sup> *The NIV Study Bible, 10th Anniversary Edition*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1995; Notes on Ephesians 5:22.

<sup>26</sup> *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*: "to arrange under, to subordinate; to subject, put in subjection; to subject oneself, to obey; to submit to one's control; to yield to one's admonition or advice"; p. 645.

claim that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives" is both misleading and false.

The claim is misleading, because although the word translated "submit" (*hypotassō*) in 5:22 is different from the one translated "obey" (*hypakouō*) in 6:1 and 6:5, both words carry the meaning of obedience. For example, Luke 2:51 uses the word *hypotassō*, but this time it is translated "obedient": "Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with them and was *obedient* [*hypotassō*] to them." Ephesians 6:1 uses *hypakouō* when it says, "Children, *obey* your parents in the Lord, for this is right." In Ephesians 6:2, Paul assumes that the commandment, "Honor your father and mother," means that children must *obey* their parents. Since the word in Luke 2:51 is *hypotassō*, is Liefeld insinuating that Jesus merely *submitted* to his parents,<sup>27</sup> but did not *obey* them? If Jesus had obeyed the commandment, "Honor your father and mother," and this commandment entails *obedience* to one's parents, it follows that Jesus obeyed his parents, and that it is correct to translate *hypotassō* as "obedient" in Luke 2:51. Liefeld must either admit that *hypotassō* can refer to obedience, or he must say that Jesus possibly disobeyed his parents and violated the commandment, in which case he blasphemes again.

However, Liefeld's claim is not only misleading – it is outright false. Since he affirms that *hypotassō* is correctly translated "submit" in 5:22 and that *hypakouō* is correctly translated "obey" in 6:1 and 6:5, his claim that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives" would mean that *hypakouō* is never used in Scripture when referring to wives. But 1 Peter 3:5-6 applies the word *hypakouō* to Sarah:

For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were *submissive* [*hypotassō*] to their own husbands, like Sarah, who *obeyed* [*hypakouō*] Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.<sup>28</sup>

Since Sarah was the *wife* of Abraham, and she *obeyed* (*hypakouō*) her husband, and since the wives are told in this passage to imitate her obedience, it necessarily follows that *hypakouō* is equally applied to all wives. The passage applies *hypakouō* to Sarah as a *wife*, and by extension to all *wives*. How then can Liefeld assert that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives"? In any case, whether *hypakouō* or *hypotassō* is used, the Bible teaches that wives must obey their husbands.

Wives may protest that this is difficult to do, but it is arguable that the husbands face an ever greater challenge: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). The command is not for the husband to merely show affection to his wife, but to love her to the death, and to cherish her more than his own life and welfare. To the extent that a man lacks this love for his wife, he is less than

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<sup>27</sup> That is, submission as defined by Liefeld – as something less than obedience.

<sup>28</sup> Submission and obedience are interchangeable in this verse: "They were *submissive* to their own husbands, like Sarah, who *obeyed* Abraham..."

a biblical man. Our estimation of a man should never rise higher than his love for God, the Bible, and his wife.

It is true that many men are difficult to obey, but it is also true that many women are difficult to love. However, just as God empowers Christian men to love their wives as Christ loves his church, he empowers Christian women to obey their husbands as the church ought to obey Christ. In any case, each person is accountable to God regardless of what the other does, as Peter affirms (1 Peter 3:1-7). The fact that a husband is unloving does not excuse the wife's disobedience, and a husband must love his wife regardless of her shortcomings.

A popular objection to the biblical authority structure for the family comes from a misuse of Galatians 3:28, and argues that the verse speaks against all gender "inequality" or distinctions: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Since there is "neither...male nor female" in Christ, some people make the argument that there should be no role distinction or difference in authority within marriage.

However, this cannot be the meaning of the verse, because elsewhere Paul prescribes role distinctions and recognizes differences in authority between husbands and wives, masters and slaves, saying, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord," and "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ" (Ephesians 5:22, 6:5). Therefore, Galatians 3:28 does not abolish all gender distinctions, and it does not contradict or nullify those biblical passages that teach the male headship of the family.

When the verse is read in its context, it becomes obvious that it refers only to the equality of every chosen individual in his access to justification by faith:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

The verse does not teach social or gender equality, but a spiritual equality among the chosen ones. All those whom God has chosen to receive salvation have equal access to justification by faith in Jesus Christ, whether they are men or women, Jews or non-Jews, masters or slaves. Gender, race, and status are irrelevant to a person's access to salvation, although only the chosen ones will obtain it (Romans 11:7). The verse carries no reference to gender equality in any other setting, and it has no relevance to role distinctions among men and women.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Richard W. Hove, *Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute*; Crossway Books, 1999.

We have examined a number of biblical passages that affirm the husband's leadership in marriage, and there are many more that reinforce this authority structure. As Elizabeth Handford writes, "If you are intellectually honest, you have to admit that it is impossible to find a single loophole, a single exception, an 'if' or 'unless.' The Scriptures say, without qualification...that a woman ought to obey her husband."<sup>30</sup> Paul says that a wife must obey her husband, "so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:5). A wife who disobeys her husband is ungodly and unspiritual. She does not care about God's honor, and brings shame to his kingdom.

## **THE FALL OF MAN**

Adam was created in the divine image, and in the beginning he was good and upright (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Then God placed him in Eden to work the land, and commanded him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17)

But Satan came in the form of a serpent. He deceived the woman into eating from the tree, and she in turn gave Adam fruit from the tree to eat. In this manner, both of them sinned against God (Genesis 3:1-13; 1 Timothy 2:14). Then God pronounced a curse upon them that included pain, toil, and death (Genesis 3:16-19), and he expelled them from Eden (Genesis 3:23). Thus man fell from his original estate.

Sin inflicted devastating effects on humanity. The FEDERAL HEADSHIP of Adam refers to his role as the representative of all mankind. Scripture teaches that when he sinned, he acted on the behalf of all his descendants in the mind of God.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, when Adam fell into sin, all of humanity fell with him: "...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men...the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men..." (Romans 5:12, 18).

Adam represented the human race as a "federal head" and not an "organic head." All of humanity is condemned by his sin not because of its physical relation to him, but because Adam represented humanity in the mind of God; that is, God sovereignly determined that

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<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Rice Handford, *Me? Obey Him?*; Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1994; p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> To be more precise, Adam represented only every member of the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, which is every member of the human race except Christ. Christ was Adam's descendant in the sense that he took on a human nature at his incarnation, but he was sinless, born without imputed guilt or inherited corruption. The effects of Adam's sin are sovereignly imputed to his descendants, and not passed on by his physical relation to them. Christ himself was the federal head of the chosen ones, and the Scripture calls him another "Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Adam represented all of humanity.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, every person conceived after Adam is condemned by inherited guilt even before the individual has an opportunity to commit personal sins. When Adam sinned, all of humanity sinned; when Adam came under condemnation, all of humanity came under condemnation (Romans 5:18).

The term ORIGINAL SIN refers to this inherited guilt instead of the sin committed by Adam, thus it is misleading.<sup>33</sup> Alternatives include "original guilt" and "inherited sin," but "original guilt" might be misunderstood as referring to the sin of Adam, and "inherited sin" might be misunderstood as referring to a transmission of guilt based on a physical relation to Adam. But as Adam was our representative in the mind of God, so is his guilt imputed to us in the mind of God. Thus IMPUTED GUILT is a more accurate term, and makes a good parallel to the IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS that the chosen ones receive by faith in the work of Christ.

In addition to Romans 5:12-19, the following also refer to the imputed guilt we received from Adam:

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5)

Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies. (Psalm 58:3)

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22)<sup>34</sup>

Then, not only did we inherit from Adam the guilt of sin, but we also inherited from him a sinful nature. This means that not only are we guilty in God's sight because of Adam's sin, but we also possess a disposition to sin and to rebel against God's laws. Grudem uses the term INHERITED CORRUPTION to designate this sinful disposition that we received from Adam.<sup>35</sup> Many people favor the non-Christian teaching that men are born with a disposition toward good; however, the Bible teaches the opposite. Proverbs 22:15 says, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child." Paul states that we all followed our "sinful *nature*" before God regenerated us, and that "we were *by nature* objects of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3).

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<sup>32</sup> Some people object that it was unfair for God to have chosen Adam as our federal head without our assent. The answer is that since God is the sole moral authority, anything that he does is righteous by definition.

<sup>33</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994; p. 494-495.

<sup>34</sup> This verse does not teach universal salvation or universal atonement. In fact, given that Scripture elsewhere denies universal salvation, the verse by necessity teaches particular atonement with Christ as the federal head of the elect. Adam represented every member in his group, and all of humanity died under him. Christ also represented every member in his group, and every member in this group were made alive. However, not every member of the human race would be saved; therefore, Christ did not represent every member of the human race, but only the elect.

<sup>35</sup> Grudem, p. 496.



Many people resist the biblical teaching on imputed guilt and inherited corruption. There are even people who claim to be Christians, but who deny that they have ever sinned. Of course, these are not genuine Christians. They may admit that they have done a number of things out of their "human weaknesses," and that they have made "mistakes," but they insist that it would be an exaggeration to label what they have done as "sins." The problem is that their definition of sin differs from the one that Scripture gives.

The Bible defines sin as the transgression of God's moral law: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). A person sins when he fails to do what God commands him to do, or when he does what God commands him not to do. Since sin is a violation of God's moral law, then whether a particular action is sin must be defined by its relation to this law, that is, in order to determine whether a violation has indeed occurred. And since God's law addresses all areas of human life either by explicit declaration or by necessary inference, our thoughts and actions are never morally neutral (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Jesus insists that each moral command from God does not only govern a person's actions, but also his thoughts. Murder is the physical act of killing another person without biblical justification,<sup>36</sup> but it is also a sin of the mind:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matthew 5:21-22)

Likewise, the moral law that forbids adultery indeed applies to the physical act of sexual infidelity, but it is also a sin of the mind: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

Jesus explains that sins proceed from the mind: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly" (Mark 7:21-22). What appears to be sins committed in the body are in fact first conceived in the mind; therefore, although not all sins of the mind result in expression in the body, all sins in the body imply prior sins of the mind. Some people commit fewer sins in the body than others, but all of us often displease God in our minds, in our thoughts. Even one fearful thought, or one second of worry, constitutes the sin of unbelief. In addition, Jesus says in Matthew 12:36, "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken." How many of us have never uttered even one "careless word"?

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<sup>36</sup> To kill with biblical justification is not murder. An example would be the execution of a violent criminal.

Paul writes that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and John says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us....If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives" (1 John 1:8, 10). Psalm 130:3-4 indicates that unless God forgives some of us, no one can be justified in his presence: "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared." Therefore, no one can say that he is sinless. Rather, every person is guilty from birth because of the imputation of Adam's sin, and in addition to this, every person has inherited from Adam a sinful disposition, which causes him to defy God in thought and in action throughout his life. The result is that every man is headed for damnation unless there is a way of salvation.

Sin has wrought considerable damage in man. Some people go as far as to argue that although God created Adam in the divine image, the Fall so marred and distorted it that what Adam passed on to his offspring was no longer the image of God, but the image of man. Proponents of this view sometimes make their argument from Genesis 5:1-3, which says, "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them 'man.' When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth."

However, the passage does not indicate that the image was so damaged that it was no longer the image of God. It states that God made Adam in the image of God, and then Adam had an offspring in the image of Adam. If  $A = B$  and  $B = C$ , then  $A = C$ . The passage does not say if the image had changed or how it had changed. Its intent is to portray the continuation of God's image in humankind rather than its abolition. If the image had remained the same in Adam, then of course his offspring was also made in the image of God.

Other passages suggest that God's image has indeed remained intact in man. Generations after the time of Adam, God said to Noah that murder was punishable by death because "in the image of God has God made man" (Genesis 9:6). James likewise reasons that it is wrong to curse other men because they "have been made in God's likeness" (James 3:9). Appealing to God's image in man would be illegitimate if man no longer exists as God's image, but these two instances are legitimate and authoritative, because the first comes from God and the second from an apostle. Also, if man is defined by God's image, then man would no longer be man if this image is so marred or distorted from its original form that it can no longer be called God's image. The conclusion is that man continues to exist as the image of God.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the image of God in man was completely unharmed by sin. After the fall of man, and as early as Genesis 6:5, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." This verse provides an apt description of man's sinful nature, that it is the "inclination of the thoughts" toward evil. Paul says that to gratify "the cravings of our sinful nature" is to follow "its desires and thoughts" (Ephesians 2:3).

Likewise, Jesus says, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19).

Thus the Bible defines the sinful nature in man as the evil disposition of the mind, or the disposition to think and behave contrary to the precepts of Scripture. All the descendants of Adam except Christ have inherited such a disposition:

Those who live according to the *sinful nature* have their *minds* set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. (Romans 8:5-7)

The god of this age has *blinded the minds* of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Once you were alienated from God and were *enemies in your minds* [as shown by]<sup>37</sup> your evil behavior. (Colossians 1:21)

Among other things, the Bible associates sin with a lack of intelligence or rationality. Ecclesiastes 7:25 mentions "the stupidity of wickedness,"<sup>38</sup> and Proverbs 6:32 says, "one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense" (NASB). Referring to non-Christians, Paul writes, "Their thoughts are useless, and their stupid minds are in the dark. They claim to be wise, but they are fools" (Romans 1:21-22, CEV). It makes no sense to rebel against God. Insofar as a person disbelieves or disobeys the Bible, he is deficient in judgment and understanding. The Bible describes him with the word *moros* – the non-Christian is a moron. On the other hand, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (Psalm 111:10).

Thus although the intellectual equipment of the non-Christian remains in existence – that is, he still has a human mind – sin has almost entirely crippled his intelligence. His mind is biased against God and truth. He constructs his worldview with impossible axioms and false premises. The result is a comprehensively delusional view of reality. Even if the non-Christian were given true premises, such as biblical propositions, his sinful and stupid mind would still err in reasoning, and he would still produce false conclusions through fallacious deductions.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> This is the alternate rendering from the NIV footnotes.

<sup>38</sup> An alternate translation is "the wickedness of stupidity." Either translation relates the evil in man to his diminished or inconsistent rationality.

<sup>39</sup> This means that the non-Christian can never discover truth by himself, and even if given the truth, he will fail to understand it or acknowledge its implications. Thus Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). This spiritual birth must be decided and caused by God without any cooperation from man.

All non-Christians are intellectually defective and inferior. Their thinking is controlled by biases and fallacies so that they consistently form conclusions that are hostile to God. It is the rational mind of man that reflects his likeness to God; therefore, the fact that evil has affected the intellect of man means that it has penetrated the core of his being. Although man still retains his likeness to God in that he still retains his mind, it has been so damaged that man is now born with a disposition toward evil, a bias toward falsehood and absurdity. The destructive consequences of sin on the mind are called the NOETIC EFFECTS OF SIN.

In order to understand the redemptive plan of God, we need to grasp the extent to which man has fallen. Sin's effect on the spiritual aspect of man is more than that of a crippling blow, but a fatal one. Non-Christians are not only spiritually sick and blind (Luke 5:31; Matthew 15:14), but they are spiritually dead. And since they are spiritually dead, they are completely helpless when it comes to spiritual operations. Ecclesiastes 9:3 says, "Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives" (NASB), and the prophet Jeremiah observes, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jeremiah 17:9). Man in his unregenerate condition is described as evil, insane, and incurable. Just as a dead person cannot request or respond to any assistance, a sinner cannot attain to or prepare for salvation by his own will or effort, and in himself he cannot even decide to repent or accept mercy from God.

Additional verses indicating that the non-Christian is spiritually dead include:

But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." (Matthew 8:22)

"For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate...."But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Luke 15:24, 32)

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. (John 5:21)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:1, 4-5)

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. (1 John 3:14)

Thus the Bible teaches what is called the TOTAL DEPRAVITY of man. It means that the effect of sin in man is pervasive, so that every part of man has been damaged and poisoned by evil. It is popular to say that there is good in every person, but the Bible

insists on the opposite. That is, until a person becomes a Christian, there is no good in him at all.

The non-Christian is spiritually dead, so that he is unable and unwilling to even cooperate with God when it comes to salvation. This means that unless God sovereignly regenerates the non-Christians – unless he decides to grant them spiritual resurrection – they will never perceive the truth of the gospel, and they will never believe in Jesus Christ. They will die in sin, and God will throw them into hell, where they will suffer extreme pain and agony forever.

## 5. CHRIST

God alone determines human destiny by choosing to save some people and to damn all others, and he saves his chosen ones by causing them to have faith in Jesus Christ. This means that a person's destiny is revealed by what he thinks about Christ, so that depending on the nature of the error, to believe the wrong theology may result in everlasting damnation. Therefore, we must study the biblical doctrine with care and reverence, and reject any position that compromises or distorts what the Bible teaches about him.

### THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Christ possesses two natures – he is both divine and human. He is God the Son, and he took up a human nature in the INCARNATION. The result neither confused nor compromised the two natures, so that Christ is fully God and fully man, and he will remain in this condition forever. The two natures of Christ subsisting in one person is called the HYPOSTATIC UNION.

There is no contradiction in this doctrine. To understand how it is self-consistent, we will first recall the earlier exposition on the Trinity.

The historic doctrinal formulation of the Trinity says that God is "one in essence and three in person." The proposition entails no contradiction. For there to be a contradiction, we must affirm that "A is non-A." In our case, this translates into, "God is one and not one," "God is three and not three," "God is one in essence and three in essence," or "God is one in person and three in person." There is contradiction only if we affirm that God is one and not one or that God is one and three at the same time and in the same sense. However, the doctrine says that God is one in one sense and three in a different sense.

The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct "persons" because they represent three systems of consciousness. To illustrate, all three knew that Christ would die on the cross to save the chosen ones, but God the Father or God the Spirit did not think, "*I will* die on the cross to save the chosen ones." Instead, they thought, "*He will*" – that is, the Son – "die on the cross to save the chosen ones." On the other hand, God the Son affirmed the same thought in the first person: "*I will* die on the cross to save the chosen ones." Thus although all three members possess omniscience, they have different relationships to the known propositions.

The "essence" in the doctrinal formulation refers to the divine attributes, or the very definition of God. All three persons fulfill the definition of deity, but this does not become tritheism because the very definition of deity involves all three members, so that each member is not an independent deity. The only idea of God in the Bible is the Trinity

– it never asserts a non-triune God. Thus when the Bible says that there is one God, it means that there is one Trinity.

The objections that the doctrine is self-contradictory and that it amounts to tritheism, therefore, entail a contrast between a biblical idea of God, where the one God is triune, and a non-biblical idea of God, where one God might mean a non-triune deity. In other words, to suggest that the doctrine teaches that God is one and three, and so contradicts itself, or that it teaches three deities, means that the biblical idea of God has already been ignored. And when an objection against a doctrine ignores what the doctrine teaches, it is an irrelevant objection. The Christian idea of God is bound to the Trinity. It affirms and assumes that God is a Trinity, and that there is only one Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

In a similar way, the doctrinal formulation for the personhood and incarnation of Christ states that he is one in one sense, and two in a different sense. That is, he is one *person* who possesses two *natures*. To ensure the clarity and coherence of this doctrine, we need to define the terms and relate them to the doctrine of the Trinity. The way "nature" is used in the doctrine of the incarnation is similar to the way "essence" is used for the Trinity. They refer to the definition of something, and the definition of something refers to the attributes or properties of something. A "person" is again defined by the consciousness or intellect.

In the incarnation, God the Son took up a human nature, or human attributes. The divine and the human natures did not combine or mingle, so that both sets of attributes remained separate. His divine nature was not diminished by his human nature, and his human nature was not deified by his divine nature. Since the divine nature was not modified by the human nature, as indeed the divine nature cannot be modified, this doctrinal formulation reaffirms the immutability of God the Son. And indeed, a human nature cannot be deified, and neither can deity be conferred. Since deity is eternal, if a person is not deity to begin with, he can never become deity.

God the Son took up a human nature, and a human nature must include a human soul or mind. Although a "person" is defined in terms of the mind or intellect, the doctrine is that Christ remains one person even though he possesses two natures. This is so because of the definition of a person as a *system* of consciousness, and because of the nature of the relationship between the divine mind and the human mind.

First, we must insist that Christ is one "person," because the Bible never refers to him as "they," as it sometimes does the Trinity. Based on the way that the Bible refers to him, the way that he refers to himself, and the way that he behaves, there is no reason to think that he is not one person. Thus there is a need to arrive at a formulation that retains the view that Christ is one person even though he has two centers of consciousness. This need is not arbitrary, but it is necessitated by the biblical data.

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<sup>1</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *The View from Above* and *Reflections on First Timothy*.

The proper formulation is to state that God the Son took up a human nature, including a human mind, in such a manner that the human mind is contained by the divine mind, although the two are not in any way mingled or confused. Whereas the divine mind has complete control over the human mind, the human mind does not have free access to the divine mind, but it receives special information and capabilities only as granted by the divine mind.

In the Trinity, there are three systems of consciousness working in unison, each fully participating in the divine attributes. When God the Son took up a human nature, he also took up a human center of consciousness. But there remains only three centers of consciousness in the Trinity, because the human nature of Christ was not deified. It was not added to the Trinity as such, since what is human cannot become divine.

There is nothing inherently impossible about this, and if this is the only formulation that accommodates the biblical data, then it is the correct position.

Any objection based on the assumption that divine and human attributes necessarily contradict one another when possessed by the same person fails to take into account that the two sets of attributes remain separate in God the Son, in the sense that they are not mingled. For example, although Christ's divine nature is omniscient and omnipotent, his human nature is not. And this remains true today. His divine attributes have not deified his human attributes, and his human attributes have not diminished his divine attributes. There is no point where the two sets of attributes clash, and thus there is no place or occasion for contradiction.

Thus the doctrine is immune to the charge of contradiction, but it is established if there is a biblical basis to affirm that Christ is both God and man.

The Bible teaches the DEITY of Christ. The Gospel of John begins by referring to Jesus Christ as the *logos*, or the *Word*:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

Verse 1 asserts the preexistence of Christ, that he had existed before creation. Christ himself confessed this in John 8, saying, "I tell you the truth...before Abraham was born, I am!" (v. 58). The word *God* (Greek: *theos*) in this verse refers to the Father, and "the Word was with God" indicates that Christ is not identical to the Father in his person. However, he is not less than God in terms of his attributes, because the verse continues to say, "the Word was God." This is an explicit statement on the deity of Jesus Christ. The words, "He was with God in the beginning" in verse 2 again refers to his preexistence and the fact that he is distinguishable from the Father.



Verse 3 credits Christ as the agent of creation: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." As Paul writes, "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Colossians 1:16). Christ not only created the universe, but even now he sustains its existence. Paul adds that "in him all things hold together" (v. 17). Elsewhere it is said that God "made the universe" through Christ, and that now Christ is "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:2-3).

Colossians 2:9 says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." Titus 2:13 says, "We wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." And we read in Hebrews 1:3, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." Hebrews 1:8 makes a messianic application of Psalm 45:6-7, so that God says to Christ, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom." Thus God the Father himself declares that Jesus is God, and that his rule will "last for ever and ever." Finally, Paul writes in Philippians 2:6 that Christ, "being in very nature God," took up a human nature.

The Bible also teaches the HUMANITY of Christ. In his Gospel, soon after John asserts the deity of Christ, he writes, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Hebrews 2:14 says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death." Paul affirms Christ's humanity when he writes, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, *the man* Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Various passages indicate that Jesus had limitations *in his human nature*. For example, he was "tired...from the journey" in John 4:6, hungry in Matthew 21:18, and thirsty in John 19:28. Most significantly, "he suffered death" (Hebrews 2:9) to purchase salvation for the chosen ones.

A number of passages in the Bible affirm or imply both the deity and the humanity of Christ. For example, John 5:18 says that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus because "he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." They saw him as a man, but they realized that he was claiming to be God. John 8:56-59 describes another such conflict:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

The people recognized that Jesus was not yet fifty years old in his human life, but he claimed that he personally knew Abraham. They did not dispute his humanity, but they also perceived that his words amounted to a claim to deity.

Matthew 22:41-45 also affirms that Jesus was both God and man:

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?"

The Pharisees acknowledged that the Christ would be the son of David, and if the son of David, Christ would be human. However, while he was "speaking by the Spirit," so that he could not have erred, David referred to Christ as "Lord" as a designation of deity. Therefore, the Christ would be both the human descendent and the divine Lord of David – Christ would be both God and man.

### **THE LIFE OF CHRIST**

Jesus Christ was miraculously conceived in the virgin Mary. As Matthew 1:18 explains, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." Verse 20 emphasizes that she was not impregnated by a man, but that the child was "from the Holy Spirit." Christ was "born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4), but rather than being conceived by the union of a man and a woman, he was conceived by "the power of the Most High" (Luke 1:35). Thus the person born was both divine and human.

Unlike all other human beings after Adam, Jesus had no imputed guilt or inherited corruption. Now, the Bible does not say that imputed guilt and inherited corruption come from only the father, and we know that Mary was sinful like the rest of humanity. Although the virgin conception indicates that he was not an ordinary man, by itself it was insufficient to protect the child from all contamination. Therefore, the sinlessness of Christ cannot be due to the virgin conception alone, but it was by God's sovereign decree that no guilt was imputed on Christ and that no corruption was inherited by him. The "power of the Most High" did not only cause Christ's conception without a human father, but also kept the child from both the judicial guilt of Adam and the corrupt nature resulting from his sin. This is so that the child could be rightly called, "the holy one" (Luke 1:35).

Some people argue that if Christ was genuinely human, then he must have been subject to sin and error. The assumption is that the tendencies to commit sins and make mistakes are intrinsic to what it means to be human. After all, these people claim, "To err is human." Therefore, to say that Christ was human means that he was also prone to sin and error, and if he was free from sin and error, he must not have been human.

However, this unintelligent position forgets that the human race now exists in a depraved state that is different from the original condition of man. Adam and Eve were not created sinful, and yet they were fully human. This means that sinfulness is not an essential human attribute. Sin has become a universal factor of human life, but it is not an original and necessary aspect of humanity. Thus it is possible to be human without imputed guilt and inherited corruption. Nevertheless, only Adam, Eve, and Jesus were actually born without sin. And only Jesus never committed sin.

This relates to what Paul says about Christ as the "last Adam" or the "second man" (1 Corinthians 15:45, 47). The "first man" Adam as a federal head represented every member belonging to the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, namely, the human race. The "second man" Jesus was also a federal head, and represented every member belonging to the group of people assigned to him in the mind of God, namely, the chosen ones.

As for the ministry of Jesus, it was characterized by preaching, teaching, and healing:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. (Matthew 9:35)

But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." (Luke 4:43)

His preaching and miracles incited increasing hostility from his enemies. He ministered for several years, and then he was betrayed by his disciple Judas into the hands of those who wished to kill him. After a time of severe and unjust treatment by the Jews and the Romans, Pilate surrendered to pressure from the Jews and sentenced him to death by crucifixion.<sup>2</sup> He died on the cross, and even his death testified to who he was: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" (Mark 15:39).

Jesus had a human body, and his death was literal and physical. The Gospels make it clear that he had in fact died:

The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

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<sup>2</sup> The New Testament insists that the Jews murdered Jesus. See Vincent Cheung, "Crucify Him!"

The Roman soldiers were well-trained, and had performed numerous crucifixions before this one. They were proficient enough to determine whether their victims were dead or alive. When they found that Jesus "was already dead" (John 19:33), they saw no need to break his legs to quicken his death. But just to be certain, one of the soldiers ran a spear into his side, which brought a "sudden flow of blood and water" (John 19:34), proving his death from a medical standpoint.

Just as his death was literal and physical, his resurrection was also literal and physical. The Bible testifies that Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day. He took up the same body, but it was changed and enhanced. Paul teaches that Christians will also receive such a body when Jesus returns and raises the dead: "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable" (1 Corinthians 15:42). In any case, the resurrected or "glorified" body could still manifest and function in the physical realm, so that when Jesus appeared to his disciples, he said to them, "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39).

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples many times over a period of forty days, showing them "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3, KJV) that he was alive. Then, he ascended up into heaven and received a position of authority from God the Father: "After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight" (Acts 1:9); "After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19).

### **THE WORK OF CHRIST**

The work of Jesus Christ is usually characterized by the ATONEMENT that he performed for the elect. The nature of the atonement is one of penal substitutionary death. Paul writes, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), but God did not require the death of the chosen ones; instead, he sent Jesus Christ to pay for their sins by bearing their guilt and dying on the cross in their stead.

One question regarding the atonement is whether the substitutionary death of Christ was necessary to redeem sinners. Two significant answers to this question are the HYPOTHETICAL NECESSITY and the CONSEQUENT ABSOLUTE NECESSITY views of the atonement. John Murray explains these two views as follows:

The view known as that of *hypothetical necessity* maintains that God could have forgiven sin and saved his elect without atonement or satisfaction – other means were open to God to whom all things are possible. But the way of the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God was the way which God in his grace and sovereign wisdom chose because this is the way in which the greatest number of advantages concur and the way in which grace is more marvellously exhibited....

The other view we call *consequent absolute necessity*. The word "consequent" in this designation points to the fact that God's will or decree to save any is of free and sovereign grace. To save lost men was not of absolute necessity but of the sovereign good pleasure of God. The terms "absolute necessity," however, indicate that God, having elected some to everlasting life out of his mere good pleasure, was under the necessity of accomplishing this purpose through the sacrifice of his own Son, a necessity arising from the perfections of his own nature.<sup>3</sup>

If only these two options were available, the preferable one would be consequent absolute necessity. The atonement was not necessary in the sense that God did not have to save anyone at all. Peter writes, "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell" (2 Peter 2:4). Just as it was not necessary for God to save the fallen angels, there was nothing in his nature or external to him that required him to save fallen men. Nevertheless, because of his sovereign love for the chosen ones, God sent Jesus Christ to save them.

Although it was not necessary for God to save sinners, once he made the decision to save some of them, the death of Jesus Christ became necessary to pay the price for their sins. Jesus prayed, "My Father, *if it is possible*, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). He asked that, if it was possible, God would let the effects intended by the atonement to be accomplished another way, while he insisted that God's will was to be done. Then, "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him" (Luke 22:43). The Father's will was for Jesus to proceed with the work of atonement, thus implied that his death was inevitable in order to achieve the intended results. After his resurrection, Jesus said to his disciples, "Was it not *necessary* for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26, NASB), and confirmed that it was indeed the only way.

The death of Christ was necessary because, if there were no atonement, then every person would have to die for his own sins (John 8:24). And since the debt of sin is too great for any mere man to fully pay, the punishment would be endless. This is everlasting damnation. A person is set free from punishment only if another were to die in his place. However, one sinner cannot die to redeem another, because each person owes an infinite debt for his own sins, so that any sinner who suffers divine wrath does so only due to his own sins. He can never pay his own debt, so still less can he pay the debt of another. Therefore, an atonement demands a perfect and innocent sacrifice of an infinite value. Although God had instituted animal sacrifice, it was only to anticipate the death of Christ, seeing that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Christ was the only acceptable and sufficient sacrifice.

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<sup>3</sup> John Murray, *Redemption – Accomplished and Applied*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955; p. 11-12.

Although consequent absolute necessity is the "classic Protestant position,"<sup>4</sup> there is a more accurate position on the necessity of the atonement. In an earlier discussion on the order of the eternal decrees, we have established supralapsarianism and refuted infralapsarianism. And from the perspective of supralapsarianism, the decree to redeem the chosen ones is logically prior to the decree for the fall of man. Thus the work of Christ in redemption was not a reaction to the fall of man; rather, God first decreed atonement for the chosen ones, and then he decreed the fall of man so that the atonement could happen.

Christ was "chosen *before* the creation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20) to be the lamb of God, that is, an atoning sacrifice. Paul writes that "eternal life" was "promised *before* the beginning of time" to "God's elect" (Titus 1:1-2), and that God selected the individuals that he would redeem "*before* the creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). God selected Christ as the redeemer and decided to redeem the elect *before* the creation of the world. In God's mind, he saved the elect before they sinned. This means that the possibility never existed that God would not redeem his chosen ones by the death of Christ. According to the logical order, the salvation of the elect was a certainty before the fall of humanity. Therefore, assuming the supralapsarian order of the eternal decrees, the atonement of Christ was an ABSOLUTE NECESSITY, although this necessity is meant in a different sense than when the other positions are asserted, since our answer has made a correction to the original question.

When it comes to redemption, many people tend to associate the work of Christ solely with his death and resurrection. However, we must not ignore the other events of his life, because the things that he performed to save his chosen ones were not limited to the events after his arrest, but also include those that went before it. His whole life contributed to the salvation of those whom God entrusted to him.

Some theologians distinguish between the ACTIVE OBEDIENCE and the PASSIVE OBEDIENCE of Christ on our behalf. Both suggest that he came to succeed where Adam failed, namely, to live in perfect obedience toward God. As Paul writes, "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:8). These terms designate the two aspects of obedience through which Christ paid for the sins of the elect and attained for them a perfect righteousness.

Christ's active obedience refers to his perfect adherence to God's laws as the federal representative of the chosen ones. He completely satisfied the moral demands of God, who credits this perfect righteousness to those who would believe in Christ. Romans 5:19 says, "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." If Christ only needed to die for the sins of the elect in order to redeem them, then there is no explanation for why he did so many other things, such as obeying God's laws, enduring temptations, performing works of charity and of power, and living a uniquely righteous life. Christ did not only rescue us from condemnation by his death, but he also merited

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

for us a perfect righteousness by his life. This aspect of Christ's redemptive work tends to be neglected, but it is a necessary part of the salvation that he attained for the elect.

This is at least part of the explanation as to why Jesus devoted only a short period of his life to public ministry, while before that he lived in relative obscurity. Before his public ministry, he was in preparation, waiting for God's appointed time, but that was not all that he was doing. Redemption depended not only on his final years or days, but also on the righteousness that he demonstrated throughout his life as their federal head. By the way that Jesus lived before and during his ministry, and by his death and resurrection, he secured a perfect righteousness to be credited to those who would believe in him.

Christ's passive obedience refers to his suffering of punishment in the place of the chosen ones. Sin demands punishment, and the proper punishment for defiance against God is endless torment in hellfire. Since the punishment is endless, there is no escape or restoration for those who would come under the wrath of God. In order to rescue a sinner and satisfy divine justice at the same time, someone else would have to die in the sinner's place. However, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), so that if any sinner were to suffer under divine wrath, he would only be receiving the proper punishment for his own sins.

Therefore, no sinner can suffer in the place of another sinner. The only solution is for a sinless and perfect man to take the place of a sinner, and so to truly suffer punishment that he himself does not deserve. This is what Jesus has done: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21, also Hebrews 4:15). And God in turn imputed his perfect righteousness to those he represented in his suffering.

Jesus suffered many things in his life on earth. These include temptations from Satan (Luke 4:1-14), opposition from religious leaders (Hebrews 12:3), and human limitations and problems such as weariness and hunger. Isaiah 53:3 says, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering," and the writer of Hebrews states:

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering....Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. (Hebrews 2:10, 5:8)

His suffering intensified from the time of his arrest to his death on the cross. This period is what most people have in mind when they refer to his suffering:

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the

Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. (Matthew 27:27-31)

Although what Jesus had to suffer involved tremendous pain and humiliation, he endured all of it to rescue the chosen ones. But it was not over, for after this, "they led him away to crucify him" (v. 31). Crucifixion, as it was meant to do, inflicted extreme pain on the victim.

The spiritual and psychological torment of bearing the guilt of sinners was even more terrible than the physical agony. Jesus lived in a state of perfect holiness, and had never felt the effects of sin upon a person's consciousness. But at that time God imputed upon him the entire weight of the guilt of the elect:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all....Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:6, 12)

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

Some people may wonder why one person's death is sufficient to pay for the sins of many. The answer is found in Romans 5:15, 18-19:

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Just as Adam represented the human race when he sinned, Jesus represented the chosen ones in his perfect righteousness and atoning sacrifice.



As for why a brief period of suffering could take away the sins of so many people, and was accepted as a substitute for the endless punishment of sinners, consider the value of the sacrifice and the intensity of the suffering. The value of Jesus Christ was such that God accepted his sacrifice as sufficient to have obtained an eternal redemption for the chosen ones: "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12); "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

In any case, it was God's sovereign acceptance of the atonement that determined and demonstrated its sufficiency. Just as Adam was an appropriate federal representative of those who were identified with him in the mind of God (the human race), Jesus was an appropriate federal head of those who were identified with him in the mind of God (the chosen ones). The atonement was sufficient and efficacious because it satisfied God's own standard of justice. No other argument is required or permitted.

As for the extent or scope of the atonement, many people assume that Jesus died for every human person; however, the Bible teaches that he died only for those whom God has chosen for salvation. This doctrine is often called LIMITED ATONEMENT, but the term can be misleading, because what is "limited" is not specified, so that it might be taken to suggest imperfection. Although only some individuals have been chosen for salvation, Christ saves these chosen ones to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25), and in this sense there is no limitation in the atonement, and there is certainly no imperfection. Thus some theologians maintain that the biblical doctrine is more properly called PARTICULAR ATONEMENT or DEFINITE ATONEMENT. I consider the term EFFECTIVE SPECIFIC ATONEMENT even more descriptive, as the following exposition of the doctrine will show.

The popular challenge to the biblical doctrine maintains that Christ made salvation merely possible for every person, but actual for no one. Salvation is applied when a person appropriates for himself the benefits of the work of Christ. In contrast, the Bible teaches that Christ has achieved actual salvation for every person for whom his work was intended, and that he only intended to secure salvation for the elect.

The doctrine of definite atonement is closely connected to God's election of individuals for salvation. Although we will continue to consider the doctrine of election, it has already been established in previous sections so that we will proceed with the assumption that it is indeed what the Bible teaches. That is, God has chosen to save some people and has chosen to damn all others. Definite atonement teaches that Christ came to die for only those that God has chosen for salvation.

If Christ had paid the price for the sins of every person, then why would anyone be condemned? Indeed, there are those who teach that the atonement of Christ ensures that no one will suffer damnation. This position of UNIVERSALISM is obviously false, because the Bible teaches that there is a hell, a lake of fire, and that God will send many people

there to punish and torture them forever. Indeed, all the non-Christians that have died are already there.

If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into *eternal fire*. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into *the fire of hell*. (Matthew 18:8-9)

You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? (Matthew 23:33)

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the *eternal fire* prepared for the devil and his angels....Then they will go away to *eternal punishment*, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matthew 25:41, 46)

*In hell*, where he was *in torment*, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am *in agony in this fire*....Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this *place of torment*." (Luke 16:23-24, 27-28)

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in *the fiery lake of burning sulfur*. This is the second death. (Revelation 21:8)

In any case, it appears that most of the people who oppose the biblical doctrine of definite atonement do not affirm actual universalism; rather, they assert a position that may be called HYPOTHETICAL UNIVERSALISM. They maintain that Christ has made salvation possible for all men, and all of them could be saved if they would only believe in the gospel. However, the problem remains: if Christ had indeed paid the price for the sins of every person, then why would anyone go to hell? What is left for God to punish? The usual answer is that a person must accept what Christ has done, else God would still condemn him even though Christ has fully paid for his sins. But this means that God would punish the same sins twice – once on Christ as he suffered on the cross, and a second time on the person who has committed those sins.

One preacher tried to escape this problem by suggesting that the only sin for which God sends people to hell is the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ. But this contradicts the biblical passages that say God will in fact take account of the personal sins of the reprobates:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. (Romans 1:18-19)

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. (Ephesians 5:5-6)

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

Moreover, this view implies that Christ failed to atone for the basic and common sin of unbelief, and thus renders his work desperately incomplete. In addition, since the imputed guilt of Adam alone is a sufficient basis for condemnation, this preacher's position implies that no one is born with imputed guilt. At least this preacher acknowledged that the atonement made an actual payment for sins, and not merely a potential payment; however, when he also affirmed that this atonement was universal, that it was done for every person, his position became inconsistent and unbiblical. Thus we perceive that an actual atonement and an universal atonement are incompatible. Either Christ made an actual atonement and he did it only for some individuals, or he did it for all individuals but it was not an actual atonement.

Actual universalism is clearly heretical, but to many people hypothetical universalism appears most consistent with their sense of justice – that is, not biblical justice – since every person somehow gets a chance to be saved, although no one has actual atonement. However, we have earlier established man's total depravity (Romans 3:10-12, 23), and that man is in a state of spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1). If so, there is no possibility that a sinner will believe in Christ if left to himself. This means that unless God chooses those who would receive salvation and redeems them by a definite atonement, no one would be saved.

Those who oppose definite atonement claim that although all are spiritually dead in sin, some people do come to faith in Christ, not because they have been chosen for salvation, but because they decide to be saved by their own will. However, the very meaning of spiritual death makes this impossible, because a dead man cannot respond to or cooperate with any assistance, or even request it. Accordingly, the Bible teaches that faith and repentance are God's gifts to his chosen ones (Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:25-26), but he does not grant them to every person, and so "not everyone has faith" (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Since faith in Christ is the only way to salvation, and God is the one who chooses those who would receive faith and repentance, this means that God is the one who chooses those who would receive salvation, and not the individuals themselves.

The biblical doctrine is that God chooses the individuals that he wishes to save, and then he changes them and causes faith in them by his divine power. This is done apart from their desire and decision, for while men remain non-Christians, they do not wish to be changed or to be given faith. Now, for the sake of argument, let us assume the false doctrine that although all non-Christians are in a state of spiritual death and are enemies of God in their minds (Colossians 1:21), some of them would still believe the gospel by their own willingness. This would mean that people who are spiritually dead and are hostile to God can somehow make the most important and the most positive spiritual decision of their lives, even a decision that directly opposes their own evil nature.

The obvious contradiction suffices as a refutation, but even if we disregard it for now, there is another problem. If non-Christians can believe by their own willingness, then how do we explain why one spiritually dead person would believe in Christ, when another spiritually dead person would refuse to do the same? Does it not follow that those who are able to make this spiritually positive decision are more righteous than those who do not? If so, then we will have to say that Christ came to save only the relatively righteous, and not the relatively sinful. The most evil men are never saved. But this contradicts the biblical record and the nature of the gospel, which can save even "the chief of sinners."

It only delays the problem to say that God exerts an amount of influence on individuals to incite them to faith. Some people would appear to need a stronger influence from God than others. But if he exerts a stronger influence on some people than he does on others, then he is in fact choosing who would be saved, especially if the amount of influence exerted does not exactly correspond to the degree of wickedness in the individuals. On the other hand, if God exerts approximately the same amount of influence on individuals, then once again only the relatively righteous will respond, which again means that Christ came only to save the relatively righteous, a notion that contradicts the teaching of Scripture.

Here is the necessary conclusion. UNLIMITED ATONEMENT or UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT is impossible because it can never fit into a system of biblical doctrines. Since the atonement involves actual and complete payment for sin, universal atonement necessarily entails universal salvation; however, Scripture teaches that many people will never be saved, and that they will be suffer endless torment in hell. The only biblical possibility is that God had selected a definite group of individuals to be saved. Then, in his work of atonement, Christ died for only these individuals, and thus securing actual salvation for every one of them. This is why the redemptive work of Christ is an effective and specific atonement.

Definite atonement is the necessary implication of other established biblical doctrines. The doctrine of sovereign election, the fact that the atonement is an actual and complete payment for sin, and the denial of actual universalism converge to render definite atonement a logical necessity. Therefore, it is certain that the atonement is specific and effective even without direct biblical evidence – it is the only possibility. That said, there

are a number of passages that affirm or imply this doctrine, and we will turn to some of them. We will also examine the claim that some biblical passages appear to teach universal atonement.

It is essential to keep in mind that the nature of the atonement is one of penal substitution, so that the death of Christ made an actual and complete payment for the sins of those he represented:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which *he bought with his own blood*. (Acts 20:28)

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; *you were bought at a price*. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood *you purchased men for God* from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10)

Christ made a full payment to purchase those for whom he died; therefore, these and other such passages (Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 1:18-19) exclude the idea that he secured only a possible salvation, but rather an actual salvation for them. Since Christ was "slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8) in the mind of God, and by this he obtained ownership of those for whom he died, this means that the identities of all those who would be saved had been determined from eternity. He then came in history to die for only those individuals.

Another indication of definite atonement comes from John 10:14-15, 25-29, where Jesus says:

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and *I lay down my life for the sheep....*

I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe *because* you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

Notice that he says, "I lay down my life for the sheep," and then he says to some, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep." He came to die for the sheep, but some people are not his sheep; therefore, he did not die for every man. Those who are his sheep belong to him because the Father "has given them to [him]," and all of them will believe the gospel, since he says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." On the other hand, since the identities of the sheep have already been determined in eternity, there is no possibility that those who are not his sheep would believe, and thus he says, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep." All those whom God has chosen will be saved, and once saved they will never lose their salvation, since Jesus says, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." Thus within several verses, Jesus not only confirms the doctrine of definite atonement, but also the doctrines of election, reprobation, and preservation.

The opponents of definite atonement claim that some biblical passages appear to teach that the redemptive work of Christ was universal rather than specific. For example:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting *anyone* to perish, but *everyone* to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants *all men* to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as *a ransom for all men* – the testimony given in its proper time. (1 Timothy 2:3-6)

However, only the most untrained and naïve exegete would assume that the words "all" and "everyone" in the Bible always refer to all human beings. There are endless examples in our daily speech in which the scope of these seemingly universal terms are limited by the context. But let us demonstrate this with biblical illustrations.

Jesus says in Matthew 10:22, "*All men* will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." The statement does not intend to say that all human beings without exception would hate Christians, since at least the Christians themselves would love one another. Moreover, those who do not know about Christians cannot hate them. The unbiblical beliefs and practices of those sinners who know nothing about Christians could amount to hatred, but it seems this is not the intent of the verse. The meaning becomes clear when we examine the context:

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (Matthew 10:21-23)

Verses 21 and 23 restrict the scope of verse 22, since it appears that the words "all men" in verse 22 mainly refer to those mentioned in verses 21 and 23. That is, "all men" means all kinds of people, such as the unbelievers in one's family and those who reject the gospel message. The meaning of "all men" narrows even more when one considers the historical context. Jesus addresses Christians in the first century, and says that they would not have finished preaching to the cities of Israel before he would come to destroy Jerusalem in AD 70.

In Acts 26:4, Paul says, "The Jews *all* know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem." Does he mean that every Jew without exception knew him? How about those who lived in the past and those who would live in the future? The next verse says, "They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee" (v. 5). The "all" in verse 4 does not designate all Jews without exception, but all the Jews who are relevant to the situation.

Psalm 8:6 says, "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put *everything* under his feet." But does this mean that even God is under his feet? Paul applies this verse to Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:27, but he restricts the meaning of "everything": "For he 'has put everything under his feet.' Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ."

Romans 8:32 is especially relevant to the atonement: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for *us all* – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" The opponents of definite atonement are tempted to interpret "us all" to mean all human beings without exception, but previous examples have shown that we cannot assume this without adequate reason. Rather, we must allow the context of the verse to dictate the scope of "us all." What is this context?

Paul indicates in Romans 1:7 that this letter is addressed to the Christians in Rome: "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Unless he subsequently widens the scope to include all human beings without exception, the meaning of "us all" in Romans 8:32 must be restricted by Romans 1:7.

But the verses that surround Romans 8:32 themselves restrict the meaning of "us all" in explicit terms:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, *who have been called according to his purpose*....He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against *those whom God has chosen*? It is God who justifies. (Romans 8:28, 32-33)

It is explicit and undeniable that the words "us all" refer only to "those whom God has chosen." Therefore, verse 32 provides no support to universal atonement; rather, it favors definite atonement.

Another example comes from Acts 2, which begins with a description of what happened on the day of Pentecost:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (v. 1-4)

Peter then stood up to preach, citing the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on *all people*" (v. 17). We have established that the words "all" and "everyone" do not always refer to all human beings, and that we must allow the context to restrict the meaning of these words. The principle holds in biblical hermeneutics and ordinary conversations, and it is most foolish and unreasonable to disregard it.

Peter is speaking within the context of the Holy Spirit's mighty manifestation on the day of Pentecost, and says that God will pour out his Spirit upon "all people." But the scope of the verse is restricted by the surrounding verses:

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from *every nation under heaven*. (v. 5)

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all *whom the Lord our God will call*." (v. 38-39)

The words "all people" are said in the context of addressing people "from every nation under heaven," so that an ethnic universality is intended, not an absolute universality that refers to all human beings. That is, God would pour out his Spirit upon people from all ethnic backgrounds, and not only the Jews. Verses 38-39 say that the promise of the Spirit is indeed "for all"; however, these words do not signal an absolute universality, but they apply to "all *whom the Lord our God will call*." This restricts the promise of the gospel itself to a select group chosen by the sovereign will of God.

As for 2 Peter 3:9 and 1 Timothy 2:3-6, they are two of the favorite passages cited by the opponents of definite atonement:



The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting *anyone* to perish, but *everyone* to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants *all men* to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as *a ransom for all men* – the testimony given in its proper time. (1 Timothy 2:3-6)

2 Peter 1:1 indicates that Peter is addressing "those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours," and 2 Peter 3:8 refers to the "beloved," which is a term designating Christians. Then, verse 9 says, "He is patient with *you*, not wanting *anyone* to perish, but *everyone* to come to repentance." Given the context provided, the word "you" must refer to a group that belongs with the Christians but includes some who have not yet become Christians. Thus the verse teaches that the Lord tarries so that the chosen ones will have time to become Christians.

1 Timothy 2:3-6 says that God "wants all men to be saved," and that Christ "gave himself as a ransom for all men." Again, we have established that the words "all" and "everyone" do not always refer to all human beings, and we have also established the doctrine of definite atonement; therefore, there is no basis to assume that this passage teaches universal atonement. In fact, since other considerations have made universal atonement impossible, we must assume that this passage teaches something else.

In any case, there is direct evidence from the context indicating that Paul does not mean all human beings when he writes "all men." Verses 1 and 2 say, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made *for everyone* – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." Paul says that Christians should pray "for everyone," and proceeds to explain that by "everyone," he means even "kings and all those in authority." Therefore, by "everyone," he means kinds or groups of people – believers are to pray for all sorts of people.

Revelation 5:9-10 was earlier cited to show that the nature of the atonement involves an actual and complete purchase by Christ of those for whom he died. It also suggests that the universality of the atonement is not an absolute universality, but only an ethnic universality:

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you *purchased men* for God *from every tribe and language and people and nation*. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

The Bible consistently teaches that the atonement is universal only in the sense that Christ died for people from every ethnic and social background; it never teaches that he died for all human beings. Since this atonement is not merely a potential payment for sins, but an actual payment, those for whom he died will surely be saved. Thus the good news is that "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to *all men*" (Titus 2:11), and not just to the Jews.

The "good news" has never been that Christ died to save every human being, but that he died to save people "from every tribe and language and people and nation." The greatness of Christ's atonement is that its effects are unlimited by ethnic and social borders: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This is the good news, and this is how we should understand the biblical passages that say Christ died for all.

An angel says to Joseph in Matthew 1:21, "[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will *save his people* from their sins." The doctrine of definite atonement takes seriously this verse and many others like it, affirming that Jesus came to actually *save* and not to make salvation merely possible, and that he came to save *his people* and not all human beings. Thus the redemptive work of Christ consists of an effective and specific atonement.

#### **THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST**

Paul writes that after Christ suffered a time of great humiliation, God exalted him to the highest place:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and

appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:18-23)

Thus the Bible teaches that Christ is in a state of exaltation under the Father, unequaled by anyone else:

For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:27-28)

Romans 14:9 says, "Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living." An early Christian confession was, "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3), and Jesus himself tells his disciples in Matthew 28:18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

The *supremacy* of Christ illustrated by these biblical passages implies the *sufficiency* of Christ. Paul says in Colossians 1:18 that in everything Christ has "the supremacy," after which he adds, "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him" (v. 19). This "fullness" includes "every spiritual blessing" (Ephesians 1:3) and "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). There is no blemish or lack in him: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority" (Colossians 2:9-10).

The sufficiency of Christ implies that through him we have "everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), and there is no need to seek other sources of spiritual power and guidance. Indeed, there is no other true source of spiritual power and guidance besides what is available through Christ. Nevertheless, many professing Christians in our day seek help from illegitimate sources when the solutions for their problems are readily available through knowledge of the Scripture and prayer in the name of Jesus. They claim to be Christians and yet become involved with occult practices such as astrology, horoscopes, necromancy, and all varieties of divination. These things are forbidden by God:

Do not practice divination or sorcery. (Leviticus 19:26)

Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:31)

I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people. (Leviticus 20:6)

A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads. (Leviticus 20:27)

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12)

Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse. (1 Chronicles 10:13-14)

On the day of judgment, no astrologer or medium can save his followers from hell, and he himself will be condemned:

Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by. That is all they can do for you – these you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you. (Isaiah 47:12-15)

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and *witchcraft*; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who *practice magic arts*, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. (Revelation 21:8)

Those who seek spiritual assistance or counsel from sources not endorsed by Scripture are spiritual prostitutes, and commit adultery against God. The Bible reserves some of the

strongest terms in condemnation against these people. Christians have no business getting involved with extra-biblical spiritual activities, and those who wallow in them contradict their profession of faith.

Isaiah 8:19 says, "And when they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (NASB). Christians by definition have entrusted all of their lives to God, and therefore the purpose of obtaining guidance is to conform their lives to his will in the first place. Why then should they consult the agents of Satan on how to order their lives in conformity to the will of God? Rather, Christians must obtain guidance only from the sources approved by Scripture. One may seek counsel from knowledgeable church leaders, but even their authority and direction are legitimate only to the extent that they are derived from Scripture. Thus in this sense, the Bible alone is sufficient.

People commit spiritual adultery not because they have studied the Bible and found it insufficient, but they have never taken the effort to receive God's wisdom from his verbal revelation. Christ is undoubtedly sufficient for all of life, but Peter explains that it is by *knowledge* about the things of God that we walk in the provisions he has given us:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance *through the knowledge* of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness *through our knowledge* of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. (2 Peter 1:2-3)

This is why the study of theology is the most important human activity. However, because of their slothfulness and wickedness, many people prefer to consult sources that are forbidden by God. An involvement with occult practices is adequate reason for excommunication; negligence in church discipline only allows these abominations to foster and spread.

The *sufficiency* of Christ implies the *exclusivity* of Christ. This means that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, and that Christianity is the only true religion or worldview

The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name. (Zechariah 14:9)

He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. (Matthew 12:30)

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:18)

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:12)

Jesus calls himself "the way" – there are not many ways to God. Jesus calls himself "the truth" – truth is not relative, changing, or progressive. There is only one eternal being who is truth, and Christ is this *logos*, or the eternal immutable principle of reason and order in the universe (John 1:1; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:1-3, 13:8). Therefore, Jesus calls himself "the life" – no one who is without Jesus Christ can have God and life; apart from him there is only despair, death, and damnation. Therefore, let us join our voices to the apostolic declarations:

If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him. Come, O Lord! (1 Corinthians 16:22)

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:8-9)

Amen. Let anyone be damned to hell who affirms a religion or worldview that disagrees with the Christian faith as it is set forth in the Bible. Let all non-Christians be damned to hell.

As followers of God and Jesus Christ, we must have no tolerance for falsehood, but we must annihilate it. We do not accomplish this by physical violence, but by aggressive intellectual discourse and rational argumentation. As Paul says:

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

With boldness and determination, we are to challenge the non-Christians in open spiritual conflict. And when the dust settles, the Christian faith will be the only one that remains.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Apologetics in Conversation*.

## 6. SALVATION

We will now consider in what way and in what order the benefits of redemption are applied to the elect, or the chosen ones. Some of these benefits occur or begin simultaneously in the new Christian when he believes in Christ, so that the order of application may not always be *chronologically* distinguishable, but the fact that some benefits are the preconditions of others implies that there is a *logical* order for the application of redemption.

An outline of the application of redemption may be derived from Romans 8:29-30, although we must also turn to a number of other biblical passages to obtain the full list of items and their positions on the list:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

This chapter will present the application of the benefits of redemption in the following order: election, calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, and preservation.

### ELECTED

The biblical doctrine of ELECTION teaches that God has chosen a definite number of individuals to receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The exact identities of these people have been determined and are unchangeable. God has chosen these individuals without any consideration of their decisions, actions, and other conditions in them. Rather, the basis of his choice was his will alone – he chose these people for salvation just because he wanted to choose them, and not because he foresaw anything that they would decide or perform.

Although the discussion on the doctrine of election continues here, it has already been explained and defended throughout the book, and all the arguments in support of divine sovereignty and election that appeared in the previous chapters also apply to this section. Keeping this in mind will reduce the need for repetition.

Our first biblical passage comes from Romans 9. Although national Israel was supposedly God's chosen nation, most of its people had rejected Christ, and thus did not obtain salvation. Does this mean that God's promise toward Israel had failed? Paul answers this question in his letter to the Romans:

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." (Romans 9:6-9)

Although "Israel" was God's chosen nation, not everyone born a natural Israelite was a genuine Israelite. God never made the promise of salvation to national Israel, but only to the true descendants of Abraham, which constitutes the spiritual Israel. When his opponents claimed to be the descendants of Abraham, Jesus replied, "If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things" (John 8:38-40). Although these people were Abraham's natural descendants, Jesus said that they were not his real children, but that their father was the devil (v. 44).

On the other hand, Paul writes, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). Those who have the faith of Abraham are the genuine children of Abraham (Romans 4:16). The promise of God was made to the spiritual descendants of Abraham, not to the natural descendants. Of course, the natural descendants of Abraham who believe in Christ are also his spiritual descendants, and thus are also heirs to the promise, but they are heirs only on account of their spiritual heritage and not their natural heritage.

Paul then cites the example of Jacob and Esau:

Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Romans 9:10-13)

Although both Jacob and Esau were natural descendants of Isaac, God treated them differently by favoring the younger over the elder. This decision was not based on "anything good or bad" that they had done, but it was so that "God's purpose in election might stand." The choice was unconditional, meaning that it was "not by works but by him who calls." Jacob was favored because of the sovereign will of God, not because of something that he had done or would do; God's choice was completely independent of any condition in him. As verse 15 says, "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" And



verse 16 states the necessary conclusion: "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Paul says that God saved us "because of *his own* purpose and grace," not because of any condition that he saw in us, and he gave us this saving grace "before the beginning of time" (2 Timothy 1:9). "He predestined us," Paul writes, "in accordance with *his pleasure and will*" (Ephesians 1:5), not because of what he knew we would decide or perform. We are called "according to *his purpose*" (Romans 8:28). To the Thessalonians, Paul writes, "He has chosen you" (1 Thessalonians 1:4), and not, "You have chosen him." He repeats this in his next letter to them and says, "God chose you to be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:13), and not, "You chose yourselves to be saved." Election does not depend on man's decisions or actions, but on the mercy of God that is dispensed by his sovereign will alone.

Jesus says in John 6:37, 44:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Verse 37 says that everyone that the Father gives to Jesus will come to Jesus, and verse 44 excludes everyone else from coming to Jesus. That is, everyone will be saved whom the Father gives to Jesus (v. 37), and no one will be saved whom the Father does not give to Jesus (v. 44). Since many other verses indicate that not everyone will be saved, it necessarily follows that the Father does not give every person to Jesus to be saved.

The word translated "draws" in verse 44 also means "drags," "pulls," or even "compels," so that it may read, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me *drags* him, *pulls* him, and *compels* him." For example, the word is translated as "dragged" and "dragging" in the following verses:

When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and *dragged* them into the marketplace to face the authorities. (Acts 16:19)

The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they *dragged* him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. (Acts 21:30)

But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are *dragging* you into court? (James 2:6)

Keeping in mind the total depravity of man (Romans 3:10-12, 23), that he is spiritually dead and cannot respond to or even request any assistance, Jesus is saying that no one can have faith in him unless chosen and compelled by the Father. Since faith in Christ is the only way to salvation (Acts 4:12), and since it is the Father alone and not the human individuals themselves who chooses those who would come to Christ, it follows that it is the Father who chooses who would receive salvation, and not the human individuals themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus repeats this teaching in John 6:63-66:

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that *no one can* come to me *unless the Father has enabled* him." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

No one can come to Jesus unless enabled by the Father; that is, no one has the ability to accept Jesus unless the Father gives it to him. He contradicts the common assumption that responsibility presupposes ability – that is, the assumption that if a person is unable to accept the gospel, then he should not be blamed for failing to accept it. However, Jesus says that all human beings are unable to accept the gospel unless enabled by God, but all who do not accept the gospel will still be punished for their sins. Thus responsibility does not presuppose ability. This same passage shows that the Father does not give everyone the ability to believe in Christ, since many of the people did not believe and "many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."

Jesus says to his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16; also v. 19). He says, "No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom *the Son chooses* to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). In Matthew 22:14, he says, "For many are invited, but *few are chosen*," and not, "For many are invited, but few accept the invitation." That is, many people may hear the preaching of the gospel, but only those "appointed for eternal life" (Acts 13:48) can and will believe. The elect are those "whom [God] has chosen" (Mark 13:20). Christians have been "chosen *by grace*" (Romans 11:5), and they are those who "*by grace* had believed" (Acts 18:27).

Therefore, a person does not choose himself for salvation by believing in Christ, but he receives salvation by believing in Christ because God has chosen him first. Faith is not the cause of election, but election is the cause of faith. We believe in Christ because God

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<sup>1</sup> "And who, in this world of death and sin, I do not say merely will, but can, will the good? Is it not forever true that grapes are not gathered from thorns, nor figs from thistles; that it is only the good tree which brings forth good fruit while the evil tree brings forth always and everywhere only evil fruit?...It is useless to talk of salvation being for 'whosoever will' in a world of universal 'won't'"; Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*; Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000 (original: 1915); p. 43.

first chose us to be saved and then caused us to believe in Christ. We are saved because God chose us, not because we chose him.

The following lists a number of biblical passages relevant to the doctrine of election, including fuller quotations of those that were partly cited above. Some of them are also relevant to the other topics in this chapter:

Blessed are those *you choose* and bring near to live in your courts!  
We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple. (Psalm 65:4)

All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom *the Son chooses* to reveal him. (Matthew 11:27)

For many are invited, but *few are chosen*. (Matthew 22:14)

If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of *the elect, whom he has chosen*, he has shortened them. (Mark 13:20)

*You did not choose me, but I chose you* and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. (John 15:16)

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but *I have chosen you* out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (John 15:19)

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were *appointed for eternal life* believed. (Acts 13:48)

When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who *by grace had believed*. (Acts 18:27)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been *called according to his purpose*. (Romans 8:28)

And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those *who did not seek* me; I revealed myself to those *who did not ask* for me." (Romans 10:20)

And what was God's answer to him? "*I have reserved for myself* seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, at the present time there is a *remnant chosen by grace*. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but *the elect did*. The *others were hardened*, as it is written: "*God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.*" (Romans 11:4-8)

For *he chose us* in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love *he predestined us* to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, *in accordance with his pleasure and will* – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:4-6)

In him we were also *chosen*, having been *predestined* according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of *his will*, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which *God prepared in advance* for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

For it has been *granted to you* on behalf of Christ not only *to believe* on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. (Philippians 1:29-30)<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is *God who works* in you *to will* and *to act* according to *his good purpose*. (Philippians 2:12-13)<sup>3</sup>

For we know, brothers loved by God, that *he has chosen you*, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You

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<sup>2</sup> No one can decide to believe the gospel against his own sinful disposition, but faith must be sovereignly granted by God as a gift (Ephesians 2:8), and he does not give faith to every person.

<sup>3</sup> God continues to control our decisions and actions according to his own purpose even after we have become Christians. We are conscious of our spiritual efforts, but such efforts are only products of the sovereign power of God.

know how we lived among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

For *God* did not *appoint us* to suffer wrath but *to receive salvation* through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:9)<sup>4</sup>

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning *God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work* of the Spirit and *through belief* in the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:13)<sup>5</sup>

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but *because of his own purpose and grace*. This grace was *given us* in Christ Jesus *before the beginning of time*, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:8-10)

But you are a *chosen people*, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)<sup>6</sup>

The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth *whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world* will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. (Revelation 17:8)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> God appointed the reprobates "to suffer wrath," but he appointed the elect "to receive salvation."

<sup>5</sup> Faith in Christ is the means by which God saves those whom he has chosen. However, it is not the reason or cause for election, but the product of election.

<sup>6</sup> Although election is not corporate, the group of chosen individuals naturally forms a "chosen people."

<sup>7</sup> In some instances, the "book of life" refers to natural life (Psalm 69:28; Exodus 32:32; Daniel 12:1), but the term is used of eternal life in later Judaism and in the New Testament (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5). Thus in some passages where it appears that God may blot out the names of some people from his book, it is referring to natural life, while in the New Testament, the emphasis is more on eternal life, and the names written in the book of eternal life will not be blotted out. Revelation 3:5 says that God will not blot out the names of those who overcome, and some people misunderstand this to imply that one may indeed be blotted out after his name has been written in the book. But 1 John 1:4 promises us that "Everyone born of God overcomes the world." Since all true Christians will overcome, and those who overcome will never be blotted out, it follows that true Christians will never be blotted out. Therefore, instead of allowing the possibility for true Christians to lose their salvation, Revelation 3:5 makes it impossible. Now, Revelation 17:8 says that the names of all individuals were either written in or excluded from the book of life "from the creation of the world," so that the identities of the elect and the reprobates have been unchangeably

They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his *called, chosen* and *faithful* followers. (Revelation 17:14)

The Bible does not paint the picture of humanity as a group of people drowning in the sea of sin, and as many as would cooperate with Christ would be rescued. Instead, it paints a picture in which all human beings are dead in the water (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 3:10), and have sunken all the way to the bottom (Jeremiah 17:9). Since they are dead, they are unable to cooperate with any assistance, or even request it. In fact, they would choose not to be rescued if left by themselves (Romans 8:7; Colossians 1:21). Against this, the Father has chosen some to be saved by Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 1:4-5) by dragging them out of the water (John 6:44, 65), purely by his own initiative (Romans 9:15). And then he raises them from the dead into new life in Christ (Luke 15:24; Romans 6:13).

The biblical doctrine of election teaches that although all human beings deserve endless torment in hell because of their sins, God has chosen to show mercy toward some of them. God chose them before the creation of the universe and before the fall of man, and he chose them without consideration of any condition in them, whether good or bad. Having chosen some for salvation, God sent Christ to die to make complete payment for their sins, so that God may credit the righteousness merited by Christ to them. On the other hand, those who are not chosen for salvation are appointed for damnation, and they will receive the appropriate punishment for their sins, which is endless torment in hell.

Many of those who refuse to accept the biblical view of election assert that God has indeed chosen some people for salvation, but the basis for his choice was his FOREKNOWLEDGE. That is, God knew beforehand which individuals would freely accept Christ, and on this basis they were chosen. But this unbiblical view destroys the meaning of election, since it means that God does not choose people for salvation at all, but that he simply accepts the choices of those who would choose themselves for salvation.

When the word "foreknowledge" is used in this manner, it is referring to God's awareness of future facts, such as the decisions and actions of individuals. Thus proponents of this view defines divine foreknowledge as prescience. Furthermore, it is implied that this knowledge is passive, so that it is not God who causes the future events that he knows, but he passively grasps what his creatures will cause to occur. However, it can be shown that to define "foreknowledge" as passive prescience generates insuperable problems, and that the term means something different in the Bible.

First, we have already shown that every person is in himself both unable and unwilling to come to Christ for salvation. He can and will come to Christ only if the Father enables

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determined. Also, since God elects or rejects individuals by name, election is not corporate in nature. See *New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition*; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996; p. 144-145.

and compels him to do so (John 6:44, 65). We have also established that the Father does not enable and compel every person to come to Christ.

Since a person comes to Christ only because the Father causes him to come to Christ, then to say that election is based on God's prescience of man's future decisions is only an awkward way to say that God knows whom he will cause to accept Christ, but such prescience would not be passive. Again, if God chooses a person because he knows that this person will accept Christ, but if this person will accept Christ only because God will cause him to do so, then to say that God knows this person will accept Christ is the same as to say that God knows that he will cause this person to accept Christ. God's election of this person is then still based on his own sovereign decision to choose this person for salvation, and not based on a passive knowledge that this person will accept Christ without God causing him to do so.

This is what the Bible teaches, but then it means that divine prescience is not a passive knowledge of what a person will decide or perform, and that it is a knowledge of what God will cause the person to decide or perform. Divine prescience is a form of God's self-knowledge – a knowledge of his own plans, and a knowledge of what he will actualize in the future. Therefore, to say that election is based on prescience does not challenge our position at all, since God's knowledge of the future is never passive, but it is he himself who causes everything that he knows will happen in the future (Isaiah 46:10).

Second, the Bible states that divine election is not based on man's decisions or actions, that God does not choose someone for salvation because of what this person will decide or perform.

For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So it *depends not* on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy....So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses. (Romans 9:15-16, 18; NRSV)

Divine election is not based on a passive prescience, and divine prescience is not passive in the first place. God chooses a person because he wants to choose that person, and he knows who will believe the gospel because he knows whom he will cause to believe the gospel.

Third, to define God's foreknowledge as passive prescience makes nonsense out of the biblical passages that base divine election on foreknowledge:

For those God *foreknew* he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been *chosen according to the foreknowledge* of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1 Peter 1:1-2)

Opponents of the biblical doctrine interpret these two passages to say that divine election is based on foreknowledge in the sense of passive prescience; that is, God has chosen those whom he passively knew would accept Christ.

Now, Romans 8:29-30 teaches that all the individuals included in one phase of the order of salvation would also enter into all the subsequent phases, and that all the individuals in any phase of the order of salvation have also been included in all the previous phases. Thus all those foreknown are also predestined; all those predestined are also called; all those called are also justified; and all those justified are also glorified. Michael Magill translates it as follows:

Because *whom* He foreknew, [*these*] He also predestined...  
And *whom* He predestined, *these* He also called  
And *whom* He called, *these* He also declared-righteous  
And *whom* He declared righteous, *these* He also glorified<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, whatever foreknowledge means, everyone who is foreknown by God is also justified by God. However, the passage does not say that it is the people's *faith* or *choices* that are foreknown by God, but that it is the *people* that are foreknown. Our opponents assume that foreknowledge means prescience. This produces an unexpected result for them: since it is the *people* that are foreknown, since divine omniscience means that everyone is foreknown by God, and since everyone that is foreknown is also justified, then it follows that if a person defines foreknowledge as prescience, he must also say that this passage teaches universal salvation.

That is, if foreknowledge refers to prescience, then God's foreknowledge includes every person, because God knows all things. Then, since the passage refers to foreknown persons, not their faith or choice, and since it says that all who are foreknown are saved, this means that all human beings are saved. However, the Bible consistently teaches that not everyone is saved or justified; therefore, foreknowledge cannot refer to prescience, especially a passive prescience, in this passage or in the context of divine election. Foreknowledge must mean something else.

In the context of salvation, the "knowledge" of God refers to his sovereign choice and purposive affection for persons and not to his passive awareness of facts. For example, Matthew 7:23 says, "Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never *knew* you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" Since Jesus as God is omniscient, "I never knew you" cannot mean that he

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Magill, *New Testament Transline*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002; p. 540.



has never been aware of these people's existence, thoughts, and actions. In fact, he knows that they are "evildoers." Therefore, the denial of "knowledge" here is a denial of a positive relationship, and not a passive awareness of facts. Accordingly, "*foreknowledge*" refers to a positive relationship established in the mind of God before the existence of the chosen individuals; that is, foreknowledge means foreordination.

The Bible uses foreknowledge in the sense of foreordination in many places. For example, God says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb *I knew you*, before you were born *I set you apart; I appointed you* as a prophet to the nations" (1:5). Of course God would know a person that he himself intends to create; he knows his own plans. The main sense is that before Jeremiah was conceived, God has chosen him. The meaning is not that God was pleased with what he passively knew about Jeremiah, but that God has designed and foreordained him.

The fact that God's foreknowledge means foreordination is made more evident by the parallelism in this verse. When one line or expression parallels another line or expression, one part expands on or clarifies the other part. For example, "For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters" (Psalm 24:2) does not necessarily mean that in addition to having "founded it upon the seas," he also "established it upon the waters." Rather, "established it upon the waters" carries a meaning similar to "founded it upon the seas," and clarifies the sense. Then, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13). It is not that we are to ask God to "deliver us from the evil one" in addition to "lead us not into temptation," but "deliver us from the evil one" is what is meant by "lead us not into temptation."

The parallelism in God's call to Jeremiah clarifies the meaning of "I knew you." Again, Jeremiah 1:5 says, "Before I formed you in the womb *I knew you*, before you were born *I set you apart; I appointed you* as a prophet to the nations." Or, we may translate the verse:

*I knew you* before I formed you in the womb,  
*I consecrated you* before you were born;  
*I appointed you* as a prophet to the nations.

The words "I knew you" correspond to "I consecrated you" and "I appointed you," and the three expressions carry similar meanings. Thus for God to "know" Jeremiah in the sense intended here is to consecrate and to appoint him for God's own purpose.

S. M. Baugh also uses this passage to illustrate the meaning of divine foreknowledge, and writes:

Another remarkable example of divine foreknowledge is expressed in Jeremiah 1:5, where God says to Jeremiah:

I knew you before I formed you in the womb,  
I consecrated you before you emerged from the womb;

I have given you as a prophet to the nations.

The first two lines are closely parallel in the number of syllables and word order...

But how can God have known Jeremiah before he was even conceived? Because he personally fashioned his prophet, just as he had fashioned Adam from the dust (Gen. 2:7), and just as he fashions all people (Ps. 139:13-16; Isa. 44:24). God foreknew not only the possibility of Jeremiah's existence – he knows all possibilities indeed – but God foreknew Jeremiah by name before he was conceived, because he knew how he would shape and mold his existence.<sup>9</sup>

F. B. Huey writes, "Here it involves a *choosing* relationship (Gen 18:19; Deut 34:10). The Lord was thinking about Jeremiah before he was born. At that time God had already designated Jeremiah to be a prophet."<sup>10</sup>

God's foreknowledge refers to a personal relationship established by his sovereign decision, and not by a passive awareness of future persons and events. Since nothing occurs apart from his active decree (Matthew 10:29), his knowledge of the future is rooted in his own sovereign will. As the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* says, "God's foreknowledge stands related to his will and power. What he knows, he does not know merely as information. He is no mere spectator. What he foreknows he ordains. He wills it."<sup>11</sup>

In the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, J. M. Gundry-Volf writes:

Rather than referring to speculative or neutral knowledge (i.e., knowledge of who will believe), the Pauline notion of divine foreknowledge is understood by many interpreters as a knowing in the Semitic sense of acknowledging, inclining toward someone, knowledge which expresses a movement of the will reaching out to personal relationship with someone. This kind of knowing is illustrated by the meaning of the Hebrew *yada*, "to know," in texts such as Amos 3:2; Hosea 13:5; and Jeremiah 1:5....In Paul's use of *proginosko* the aspect of pretemporality is added to the Hebrew sense of "know" as "have regard for" or "set favor on." The result is a verb which refers to God's eternal loving election.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner & Bruce A. Ware, ed., *Still Sovereign*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000; p. 186.

<sup>10</sup> F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah & Lamentations* (The New American Commentary); Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1993; p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1984; "Foreknowledge," p. 420.

<sup>12</sup> *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993; "Foreknowledge, Divine," p. 310-311.

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* reinforces several points that we have mentioned:

Arminian theology, in all its variant forms, contends that God's foreknowledge is simply a prescient knowledge, a knowing in advance whether a given person will believe in Christ or reject him. God's election, therefore, is said to be simply God's choice unto salvation of those whom He knows in advance will choose to believe in Christ. God foresees the contingent free action of faith and, foreseeing who will believe in Christ, elects those because they do. But this is destructive of the biblical view of election. In biblical thought election means that God elects people, not that people elect God. In Scripture it is God who in Christ decides for us – not we who, by making a decision for Christ, decide for God.

Reformation theology has contended that the divine foreknowledge contains the ingredient of divine determination. The Reformers claimed that God indeed foreknows who will believe, because believing in Christ is not a human achievement, but a divine gift imparted to men by God's grace and Spirit. Thus God's foreknowledge is not merely prescience, but a knowledge that itself determines the event. That is, in Reformation thought what God foreknows He foreordains....

That God's foreknowledge contains the idea of divine determination does not rest merely on a few biblical texts but reflects a truth about God that comes to expression in a variety of biblical concepts descriptive of the unique and mysterious character of God's actions. God's foreknowledge is itself a form of determination which accounts for the reality of that which is divinely foreknown....<sup>13</sup>

Thus it is a mistake to define foreknowledge as passive prescience because the Bible means something different by the term.

Now that we have clarified the meaning of foreknowledge, we must apply the correct definition to the passage in Romans:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

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<sup>13</sup> *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982; "Foreknowledge," p. 336-337.

Baugh writes:

The classic Arminian interpretation of Romans 8:29, that God's foreknowledge of faith is in view, is clearly reading one's theology into the text. Paul does not say: "whose faith he foreknew," but "whom he foreknew." He foreknew us....But in Romans 8:29, predestination is not dependent on faith; rather, God predestines us on the basis of his gracious commitment to us before the world was....

Perhaps another rendering better expresses the concept behind Romans 8:29: "Those to whom he was previously devoted...." This again, is not to say that God's foreknowledge is devoid of intellectual cognition; to have a personal relation with someone, such as a marriage relation, includes knowledge about that person....God has foreknown us because he fashioned each of us personally and intimately according to his plan....

That Paul refers to this concept of a committed relationship with the phrase *whom he foreknew* in Romans 8:29 is confirmed by the context....

Further confirmation of "foreknowledge" in Romans 8:29 as referring to a previous commitment is found in a nearby passage, Romans 11:1-2, where *proginosko* can have only this meaning: "God has not rejected his people, has he? No way! For I also am an Israelite....God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." As in Romans 8:29, the objects of foreknowledge are people themselves rather than historical events or a particular person's faith....

The Arminian notion of "foreseen faith" is impossible as an interpretation of God's foreknowledge in Romans 11:1-2, and, consequently, in the earlier passage, Romans 8:29, as well. The latter explains that God initiated a committed relationship from eternity with certain individuals whom he predestined for grace.<sup>14</sup>

F. F. Bruce agrees, and says that, "God's foreknowledge here connotes that electing grace which is frequently implied by the verb 'to know' in the Old Testament. When God takes knowledge of people in this special way, he sets his choice on them."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Still Sovereign*, p. 194-195.

<sup>15</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries), Revised Edition; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985; p. 166.

Douglas Moo also argues that foreknowledge means foreordination when it appears in Romans 8:29:

In [Arminianism] the human response of faith is made the object of God's "foreknowledge"; and this foreknowledge, in turn, is the basis for predestination: for "whom he foreknew, he predestined." But I consider it unlikely that this is the correct interpretation. (1) The NT usage of the verb and its cognate noun does not conform to the general pattern of usage....the three others besides the occurrence in this text, all of which have God as their subject, mean not "know before" – in the sense of intellectual knowledge, or cognition – but "enter into relationship with before" or "choose, or determine, before" (Rom. 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2). (2) That the verb here contains this peculiarly biblical sense of "know" is suggested by the fact that it has a simple personal object. Paul does not say that God knew anything *about* us but that he knew *us*, and this is reminiscent of the OT sense of "know." (3) Moreover, it is only *some* individuals...who are the objects of this activity; and this shows that an action applicable only to Christians must be denoted by the verb. If, then, the word means "know intimately," "have regard for," this must be a knowledge or love that is unique to believers and that leads to their being predestined. This being the case, the difference between "know or love beforehand" and "choose beforehand" virtually ceases to exist.<sup>16</sup>

Although foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 cannot mean passive prescience, John Murray contends that even if it does, it still does not challenge the doctrine of election:

For it is certainly true that God foresees faith; he foresees all that comes to pass. The question would then simply be: whence proceeds this faith which God foresees? And the only biblical answer is that the faith which God foresees is the faith he himself creates....The interest, therefore, is simply one of interpretation as it should be applied to this passage....On exegetical grounds we shall have to reject the view that "foreknew" refers to the foresight of faith....<sup>17</sup>

As the *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* says, "In Romans 8:29 and 11:2, the apostle Paul's use of the word foreknew means 'to choose' or 'to set special affection on.' The electing love of God, not foresight of human action, is the basis of His predestination and salvation."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament); Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996; p. 532-533.

<sup>17</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 1; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997; p. 316-317.

<sup>18</sup> *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986; "Foreknowledge."

Some of those who refuse to accept this biblical usage of the word argue that, if foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 means foreordination, then it would render redundant the word "predestined," since the verse says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined." It seems that the two words refer to separate concepts in the verse; therefore, they argue that we should assume passive prescience as the definition of foreknowledge.

But this misrepresents the verse. If the word *foreknew* means *foreordained* in this verse, it would refer to God's election, that is, his choice of the specific individuals that he would save. Then, the verse says that these whom God has elected, he has also *predestined*, not to repeat the idea of election, but it is to say that he has set forth a "destination" or purpose in advance for the elect – namely, God's will is for them "to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." Foreknowledge in this verse refers to God's election of individuals to salvation, and predestination is associated with the specific purpose or end that God has designed for his elect.

In other words, God has not only chosen the elect to receive salvation from sin, but also to become like his Son, Jesus Christ. The verse is saying that the same people whom God has chosen are also the people whom God has given the "destination" or purpose to become like Christ, and that he has made this decision in advance, and thus he "predestined" them.

Accordingly, Gundry-Volf writes:

Paul distinguishes between divine foreknowledge and divine predestination in Romans 8:29: "those whom he foreknew, he also predestined." While foreknowledge denotes the exercise of God's will to establish a special relationship with those whom God graciously elect before all time, predestination expresses God's appointing of them to a specific goal before all time...In Romans 8:29 this goal is conformity with the image of the Son, a reference to the final salvation of the elect. Foreknowledge as divine choice is thus the basis of predestination to glorification with Christ. Foreknowledge does not have to be understood as foresight of faith in order to be distinguished from predestination.<sup>19</sup>

Based on these observations and arguments, it is necessary to understand foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 as foreordination. Kenneth Wuest recognizes this, and translates verses 29 and 30 as follows:

Because, those whom He *foreordained* He also *marked out beforehand* as those who were to be conformed to the derived image of His Son, with the result that He is firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, those whom He thus marked out beforehand, these He also summoned. And those whom He summoned, these

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<sup>19</sup> *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, p. 311.

He also justified. Moreover, those whom He justified, these He also glorified.<sup>20</sup>

The word "foreordained" corresponds to foreknowledge, and the phrase "marked out beforehand" corresponds to predestination. Similarly, these verses in the GNT are translated as follows:

Those whom God had *already chosen* he also *set apart* to become like his Son, so that the Son would be the first among many believers. And so those whom God set apart, he called; and those he called, he put right with himself, and he shared his glory with them.

Acts 2:23 and 4:28 further confirm this understanding of foreknowledge. The first verse says, "This man was handed over to you by God's *set purpose* and *foreknowledge*; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." This does not mean that God was passively aware of what men would do to Jesus, but it means that his suffering was in fact God's "set purpose," which is also the meaning of foreknowledge. Acts 4:28 also refers to the death of Christ, but it says, "They did what your power and will had *decided beforehand* should happen." But we saw that in 2:23 Peter credits the incident to God's "set purpose" and "foreknowledge." It is evident that these terms have equivalent meanings, so that God's foreknowledge refers to his "set purpose" or what he has "decided beforehand."

In fact, 4:28 gives us a good definition for God's foreknowledge – it is "what [his] power and will had decided beforehand should happen." As Martin Luther writes, "It is, then, fundamentally necessary and wholesome for Christians to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His own immutable, eternal, and infallible will."<sup>21</sup>

Without further argument, we must conclude that foreknowledge in 1 Peter 1:2 also cannot refer to a passive prescience. The verse says that we are, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Of course we are – the verse means that Christians have been chosen and foreordained for salvation by the sovereign will of God.

Then, many people observe that the biblical doctrine of election contradicts the idea that man has "free will," and since they insist that man has free will, they reject the doctrines of God's sovereignty and election as presented in Scripture. The answer to this objection is that human beings do not have free will. Although even Christians often assume that

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<sup>20</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 2000 (reprint of 1957 edition); p. 80.

human beings possess free will, it is a pagan notion that finds no support from the Bible.<sup>22</sup>

R. K. McGregor Wright defines "free will" as follows: "By the term *free will* I mean the belief that the human will has an inherent power to choose with equal ease between alternatives. This is commonly called 'the power of contrary choice' or 'the liberty of indifference....' Ultimately, the will is free from any necessary causation. In other words, it is autonomous from outside determination."<sup>23</sup> Free will assumes "the absence of any controlling power, even God and his grace, and therefore the equal ability in any situation to choose either of two incompatible courses of action."<sup>24</sup> Assuming this definition, man does not have free will.

Suppose we think of the exercise of the will as the movement of the mind toward a certain direction, we must ask what it is that moves the mind, and why the mind moves toward where it moves. Even if we assume that the mind can move itself, we are still explain why it moves itself toward a given direction, that is, why it chooses one option instead of another. If one traces the movement and direction of the mind to factors external to the mind itself – factors that impress themselves upon the consciousness from the outside, and thus influencing or determining the decision – then the mind is not free. And if one traces the cause to the person's innate propensities, then the mind is likewise not free, because these inclinations have not been freely chosen by the person in the first place. For the innate propensities to be freely chosen, they would have chosen without any influence by external factors and other innate propensities. But then we are back to the question of how and why there were chosen.

If the human mind makes decisions based on factors, causes, and influences not chosen by the mind itself, then these decisions are not free. Although we affirm that man has a will, so that the mind indeed moves toward various options, and makes decisions, the ability and reason for the movement, for this mental action, is never determined by the mind itself, but by something other than the mind. Since this is necessarily true of all creatures, it follows that only God possesses free will.

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<sup>22</sup> R. K. McGregor Wright traces the concept of free will to humanistic and anti-Christian systems of philosophy, and notes its historical infiltration into the church. Of course, the human obsession with autonomy was first introduced to Adam and Eve by the devil (Genesis 3:1-7). Some translations of the Bible contain the term "freewill" in a number of verses, but these instances do not relate to our topic, since they only refer to things like "freewill offerings" as opposed to legislated and required offerings. "The point is a distinction in the Law, not a metaphysical statement about whether the faculty of choice is caused or not" (*No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism*; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996; p. 157). Likewise, Luther writes, "That is to say, man should realise that in regard to his money and possessions he has a right to use them, to do or to leave undone, according to his own 'free-will' – though that very 'free-will' is overruled by the free-will of God alone, according to His own pleasure. However, with regard to God, and in all that bears on salvation or damnation, he has no 'free-will', but is a captive, prisoner and bondsman." He suggests that the "safest and most Christian thing to do" is to "drop this term altogether" (Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; p. 107).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43-44.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Predestination*; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987 (original: 1969); p. 113.



The biblical doctrine of divine sovereignty establishes that God is the ultimate and immediate cause – the only real cause – of all "motions" and events, whether physical or mental. Since human decisions are not self-caused or uncaused, but caused and determined by God, man has no free will. As Luther writes:

It is a settled truth, then...that we do everything of necessity, and nothing by "free-will"; for the power of "free-will" is nil...It follows, therefore, that "free-will" is obviously a term applicable only to the Divine Majesty; for only He can do, and does (as the Psalmist sings) "whatever he wills in heaven and earth" (Psalm 135:6). If "free-will" is ascribed to men, it is ascribed with no more propriety than divinity itself would be – and no blasphemy could exceed that!<sup>25</sup>

Man has no free will whether or not we are talking about salvation. And when it comes to salvation, no one under the dominion of sin can simply "decide" to be free from it unless God causes him to be free, nor would the person wish to be free from sin before this occurs. Salvation is wholly the work of God, so that no one may boast of his works or his good sense in choosing Christ and believing the gospel (John 15:16; Ephesians 2:8). Even after a person has become a Christian, he still has no free will: "It is God who works in you to *will* and to *act* according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13).

The Bible teaches that God is the one who determines the thoughts and decisions of man. He exercises immediate control over the mind, and he determines all the innate propensities and external factors. God is the one who forms a person in the womb, who determines his inward dispositions, and who arranges his outward circumstances. The doctrine of election indeed contradicts the free will of man,<sup>26</sup> but free will is a human invention – a sinful assumption or aspiration – and not a biblical teaching. The "free will" objection against divine election fails because free will does not exist.

Another objection against the biblical doctrine of divine sovereignty is that it appears to contradict human responsibility. The assumption is that human responsibility presupposes human freedom. But if God exercises complete control over all human decisions and actions, then man is not free, and therefore divine sovereignty and human responsibility seem to contradict each other. And this is a problem because it is insisted that human responsibility must be maintained.

The first definition for "responsible" in *Webster's New World College Dictionary* says, "expected or obliged to account (*for* something, *to* someone); answerable; accountable."<sup>27</sup> Now, without any regard as to whether man is free, he is certainly "expected or obliged to

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<sup>25</sup> Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; p. 105.

<sup>26</sup> "One of the standard objections to predestination is that it conflicts with free will. The person who makes this objection is undoubtedly correct on one thing, viz., free will and predestination are contradictory concepts. No one who knows the meanings of the terms can believe both doctrines, unless he is totally insane"; Clark, *Predestination*; p. 110.

<sup>27</sup> *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition*.

account" for his thoughts and actions to God. The Bible says, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked; therefore, human responsibility is established apart from any discussion on human freedom.

Man is responsible precisely because God is sovereign, because to be responsible means to be held accountable. It means that a person must explain and justify his thoughts and his actions, and that he will be rewarded or punished according to a certain standard of right and wrong. Moral responsibility has to do with whether God has decided to judge man and whether God has the power and authority to enforce his decision. It is entirely dependent on divine sovereignty and has nothing to do with human freedom. Man is responsible because God will reward obedience and punish rebellion, but this does not suggest that man is free to choose between obedience and rebellion.

Romans 8:7 says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, *nor can it do so.*" Man is responsible for his sins not because he is free or able not to abstain – this verse says that he cannot abstain from sin. Rather, man is responsible because God has decided to judge him for his sins. Therefore, human responsibility does not presuppose human freedom, but it presupposes divine sovereignty. Thus divine sovereignty indeed contradicts human freedom, but it alone establishes human responsibility.<sup>28</sup>

For many people, the issue now becomes one of justice. They insist that it would be unjust for God to condemn sinners if they were never free to decide or perform otherwise, and if they were created for damnation in the first place. Since this objection is also used against the biblical doctrine of reprobation, we will answer it when we come to that doctrine.

Some people cannot deny that the Bible teaches divine election, and that election is for salvation; nevertheless, they refuse to affirm that God chooses specific *individuals*. They propose that God indeed elects some for salvation, but that election is *corporate* in nature. They claim that Ephesians 1:4 supports this position: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world." Since the verse says that God's election is *in Christ*, the objection against the election of individuals for salvation is that the object of election is Christ, and whoever comes into Christ becomes one of the elect.

However, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:27-30, "But *God* chose...so that no one may boast before him. It is *because of him* that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." He says that it is God who made the choice in election so that "no one may boast before him." Against those who say that only Christ is the object of election, and that whoever comes into him becomes God's elect, the passage says, "It is *because of him* that you are in Christ Jesus." God chooses who becomes "in Christ," and therefore divine election is in fact a selection of individuals.

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<sup>28</sup> "The error of Arminianism is not that it holds the Biblical doctrine of responsibility, but that it equates this doctrine with an unbiblical doctrine of free will"; Charles H. Spurgeon, "Free Will – a Slave."

Moreover, corporate election fails to explain why anyone would come into Christ without having been individually chosen and then "dragged" to Christ by God. It destroys all sense of divine election with a view of salvation that amounts to self-election, since the sinner must choose Christ without first being chosen and enabled by God. Thus corporate election must face all the problems associated with self-election and human freedom, which we have refuted with many arguments. This unbiblical position ignores the biblical passages teaching that God selects individuals for salvation, some of which we have already listed or discussed. As John 10:3 says, "He calls his own sheep *by name* and leads them out." According to what we have established about the depravity of man and his bondage to sin, if Christ were to be the sole object of election, no one would enter into him, and no one would be saved. For a person to be saved, God must first choose and then directly act on his mind. Therefore, we insist that divine election consists of God's choice of individuals for salvation.

In any case, it is possible to refute corporate election by directly dealing with the passage in question. Ephesians 1:4-6 says:

For he *chose us* in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he *predestined us* to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Verse 4 says that he chose us "in him," but the object of God's choice is "us" and not Christ. That is, it says that he "chose us," and not that he "chose him." Verse 5 excludes corporate election when it says, "he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ." God predestined *us* – not Christ, but the individuals – to be adopted as his sons *through* Jesus Christ. Likewise, verse 6 says, "he has freely given us in the One he loves." God gives salvation to *us* in Christ – he does not give salvation to Christ and then wait for us to come into Christ by some sort of self-election.

Christ is indeed the elect or chosen one to *achieve salvation*, but he is not the elect when it comes to who would *receive salvation*. Election in the context of receiving salvation refers to the *individuals* that God has chosen to save *through* Jesus Christ. Christ is the one chosen *to save*, and the elect are the ones chosen *to be saved*. The "in him" in verse 4 corresponds to the "through Christ Jesus" in verse 5 and the "in the One he loves" in verse 6, with all three expressions referring to him as the *means* of salvation, and not the *object* of salvation.

Another objection against the biblical doctrine of election is that it destroys the reason or motive for evangelism. That is, some people complain that if God has predetermined the identities of those who would be saved, this would render the work of evangelism meaningless. Certainly, they would like others to think that this objection arises from a pious and noble concern for evangelism; however, the necessary assumption behind the objection is that the only sufficient reason or motive for obedience to God's command on

evangelism is that disobedience to it would result in the damnation of multitudes. Thus instead of piety, the objection betrays an evil and rebellious mentality.

In other words, a person who makes this objection implies that obedience to God is meaningful only if disobedience would result in an almost inconceivable and permanent disaster for millions, even billions, of people; otherwise, he has no reason or motive to obey God at all. That is, he has no respect for the person of God at all; he is only concerned about consequences. Although God has commanded him to preach the gospel, this carries no weight with him whatsoever! He has no incentive to obey unless he knows that other people will be forever damned for his disobedience. Unless his role is so essential that it absolutely determines the salvation or damnation of other people, he thinks it is useless to pay attention to God. Thus this objection poses no threat to the biblical doctrine of election, but it exposes the person who raises it as a disgrace to humanity and to the church.

God's command to preach the gospel is sufficient to give meaning and purpose to evangelism. His commands are inherently meaningful, and demand obedience. In addition, we should understand that he controls both the means and the ends. He does not determine only *what* he wants to happen but also *how* he wants it to happen, and he has decided that Christians should have the role of preaching in bringing the chosen ones to faith in Christ. We should be grateful that God would use our effort as the means by which he summons those he has chosen for salvation (2 Timothy 2:10).

Indeed, God does not need us: "And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25). His commands never reflect his need, since he has none, but they reflect his preceptive will for our lives. We preach the gospel so that, in obedience to God's command and foreordination, those who are "appointed for eternal life" (Acts 13:48) will come to Christ, and not because they will be damned without us. Nevertheless, to some people it is more important to be needed by God than to be obedient to God. And if God does not desperately need them, then the whole thing is meaningless. Such is the depravity and foolishness of men.

The other side of the doctrine of election is the doctrine of REPROBATION. Just as God has created and chosen some people for salvation, he has created and chosen all others for damnation. Just as he has determined which specific individuals would be saved, he has determined which specific individuals would be damned:

Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – *prepared for destruction?* (Romans 9:21-22)

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the

capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also *what they were destined for*. (1 Peter 2:7-8)

Theologians attempt to dilute this doctrine by suggesting that God merely "passes over" the reprobates. However, the Bible not only teaches that God deliberately creates some people as reprobates (Romans 9:21-22), but it also teaches that God actively hardens their hearts against himself and the gospel:

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go. (Exodus 10:20)

For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses. (Joshua 11:20)

Why, O LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance. (Isaiah 63:17)

He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn – and I would heal them. (John 12:40)

Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. (Romans 9:18)

What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." (Romans 11:7-8)

We have established that creatures have no free will, and that human responsibility has no direct relationship to human freedom. God controls all things, including the thoughts and actions of man, but man is still responsible for his thoughts and actions precisely because God sovereignly holds him accountable.

Responsibility presupposes accountability, but accountability does not presuppose ability or freedom. Rather, accountability presupposes one who demands accountability. Since God demands accountability – since he will reward righteousness and punish wickedness – man is accountable. Since God is sovereign, he decides what he wants to decide, and whether man has free will or not has no logical place in the discussion.

For many people, now the question becomes one about justice. They insist that it would be unjust for God to punish those whom he has predestined to damnation, and who could not decide or perform otherwise.

Paul anticipates this objection in Romans 9:19, and writes, "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?'" He replies, "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" (v. 20). God rules by absolute authority – no one can hinder him, and no one can question him. This is true because God is the creator of all that exists, and he has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creation: "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" (v. 21).

The apostle continues, "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?" (v. 22-24). This is still part of the answer to the question in verse 19: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" Paul is saying that since God is sovereign, he can do whatever he wishes, and this means he has the right to create some people destined for salvation, and some destined for damnation. Of course, those who are created and chosen for salvation rejoice in this doctrine, and those who are created and chosen for damnation detest it. In any case, there is nothing that anyone can do about it. Peter says regarding those who reject Christ: "They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for" (1 Peter 2:8).

The issue of justice is brought up against the doctrine of reprobation only because people are impious and stupid. In its various forms, the objection amounts to the following:

1. The Bible teaches that God is just.
2. The doctrine of reprobation is unjust.
3. Therefore, the Bible does not teach the doctrine of reprobation.

Premise (2) has been assumed without any biblical or rational warrant. By what standard is a person to judge whether the doctrine of reprobation is just or unjust? If the Bible mentions it, then it is not up to us to decide the issue. Rather, the Christian reasons as follows:

1. The Bible teaches that God is just.
2. The Bible affirms the doctrine of reprobation.
3. Therefore, the doctrine of reprobation is just.

The pivotal point is that the Bible affirms the doctrine; whether it is just or unjust should not be assumed beforehand. As Calvin notes:

For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it. But if you proceed further to ask why he so willed, you are seeking something greater and higher than God's will, which cannot be found. Let men's rashness, then, restrain itself, and not seek what does not exist, lest perhaps it fail to find what does exist.<sup>29</sup>

To dictate how God's mercy is to be dispensed is evidence proving the utter sinfulness and foolish audacity of man, and not an argument against the doctrines of election and reprobation.

We must fully affirm what the Bible says about human depravity to understand election and reprobation. For example, Romans 3:10-12, 23 says, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one....for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Every human being is a sinner, and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23); therefore, justice demands that every person be damned.

The doctrines of election and reprobation do not say that the elect receive *mercy* while the non-elect receive *injustice*. Since all human beings deserve damnation, the biblical doctrines of election and reprobation teach that those whom God has chosen for salvation would receive *mercy*, and what those whom he has chosen for damnation would receive is precisely *justice* – and that is why they would be damned. God has no obligation to show mercy to anyone at all, and that he shows mercy to some does not mean that he must show mercy to all.

Once it is claimed that God is somehow required to be merciful to someone, we are no longer speaking of mercy, but justice. It is not mercy that grants what is required, but justice. But in this case justice results in eternal damnation and not salvation. What is "fair" is for everyone to be damned, since our sins have rendered this the proper punishment. We should be thankful that God is merciful to save anyone at all, rather than to accuse him with the blasphemous charge of being unjust or not merciful enough. As Benjamin B. Warfield writes:

Shall we not fix it once for all in our minds that salvation is the right of no man; that a "chance" to save himself is no "chance" of salvation for any; and that, if any of the sinful race of man is saved, it must be by a miracle of almighty grace, on which he has no claim, and, contemplating which as a fact, he can only be filled with wondering adoration of the marvels of the inexplicable love of God? To demand that all criminals shall be given a "chance" of

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<sup>29</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Edited by John T. McNeill; Translated by Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960; p. 949, (III, xxiii, 2).

escaping their penalties, and that all shall be given an "equal chance," is simply to mock at the very idea of justice, and no less, at the very idea of love.<sup>30</sup>

Although we have no right to demand an explanation, Paul does tell us why God's work of reprobation is both good and necessary:

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:22-24)

God has "prepared for destruction" certain individuals, so that he may "show his wrath and make his power known." Paul explains that, "he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory." In other words, God damns the reprobates in order to display his glory and his wrath to his chosen ones.

Since the chosen ones have been "saved from God's wrath" (Romans 5:9) by Christ, they will never experience his wrath. But wrath remains a divine attribute, an essential aspect of his nature. As explained earlier, God's love toward his chosen ones is characterized by his willingness to reveal himself to them (John 14:21-23, 15:15, 16:14; 1 Corinthians 2:9-12), and therefore he has prepared the reprobates for such a purpose.

God has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creation just as a potter has the right to do whatever he wishes with a lump of clay; therefore, one cannot accuse God of being cruel or unjust for creating the reprobates for the above purpose. God is the sole moral authority, and the Bible calls him just and good; therefore, whatever he says and does is just and good by definition. It follows that his work of reprobation is just and good by definition, and no one can accuse God of unrighteousness – there is no standard of right and wrong outside of God by which to accuse God of wrongdoing. God is his own moral standard, and since he calls himself righteous, he must therefore be righteous.

Instead of inciting us to question God's justice, the doctrine of reprobation further enlightens us about God's great love for his chosen ones. Since God controls even the reprobates to serve his own ends (Proverbs 16:4), and he "causes all things to work together" (Romans 8:28; NASB) for the good of the elect, it follows that he manipulates the lives of the reprobates in ways that promote the good of his chosen ones. And Scripture teaches that this is what he has been doing. Thus even the damnation of the non-Christians is for the benefit and edification of Christians, for such is God's love toward his chosen ones.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*; p. 80-81.

<sup>31</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Ephesians, The Author of Sin, and Blasphemy and Mystery*.



## SUMMONED

Romans 8:29-30 tells us that to those whom God has chosen for salvation, he has also foreordained a purpose, namely, to conform to the likeness of his Son. And to those whom he has foreordained this purpose, he also issues a call to them in due time so that they may come to Christ. Thus the passage says, "Those he *predestined*, he also *called*" (v. 30).

Recall that all who are included in one phase of the application of redemption also enter into the next phase. All whom God has selected, he has also predestined, and all whom God has predestined, he also calls to Christ. But verse 30 goes on to say, "Those he *called*, he also *justified*." Thus all whom God calls will also attain justification. And since justification is by faith in Christ, this means that all whom God calls will believe in Christ and be justified. Therefore, God's calling toward the elect is bound to be effective, and so theologians call this act of God an EFFECTUAL CALLING.

Since the effectual calling is one whose result is guaranteed, it is not like an "invitation" that the elect may accept or reject. Rather, it is more like what we mean by the verb "to summon." In calling his elect, God does not merely invite them to do something, but God himself does something to them. As Sinclair Ferguson writes, "He who calls them creates in them the ability to respond so that in the very act of his calling he brings them into new life."<sup>32</sup> Thus those whom God has selected and predestined in eternity, he also summons to Christ in history.

God summons the elect usually through the preaching of the gospel. Now, Christians do not first learn the identities of the elect, and then proceed to preach the gospel only to them. Rather, they preach the gospel "to all creation," and "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). Therefore, whether it is in the form of public oration, private conversation, written literature, or other means, the preaching or the publication of the gospel goes forth to both the elect and the non-elect. The elect will come to faith in Jesus Christ; the non-elect will either reject the message, or produce a temporary and false profession of faith.

For this reason, theologians distinguish between the OUTWARD CALLING and the INWARD CALLING. The outward calling refers to the preaching of the gospel by men, and is presented to both the elect and the non-elect. On the other hand, the inward or effectual calling is a work of God that accompanies the outward calling to cause the elect to come to faith in Christ. The preaching of the gospel appears as an outward calling to all men, but it also becomes an inward summons to the elect. The outward calling is produced by men, but the inward calling is a work of God that occurs only to the elect. And this inward calling is usually concurrent with the outward calling. In other words, many people may hear the gospel in a given setting, but God will cause only the elect to believe what is preached, while he hardens the non-elect against it.

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<sup>32</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction*; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997 (original: 1981); p. 34.

Matthew 22:14 says, "For many are invited, but few are chosen." The word "invited" in this verse may be translated "called," as many other translations have it. Many are indeed "invited" in that they hear the outward call of the gospel, but only a few are among God's chosen ones, and therefore genuine and permanent professions of faith only come from these people.<sup>33</sup>

## REGENERATED

The sinful nature of man is the mind's strong disposition toward evil (Colossians 1:21; Romans 8:5-7). REGENERATION is a work of God in which he changes this evil disposition into one that delights in the laws and precepts of God (Ezekiel 11:19-20, 36:26-27), and this results in what amounts to a spiritual resurrection. Regeneration is a drastic and permanent transformation at the deepest level of one's personality and intellect, which we may call a RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION.<sup>34</sup> The person's most basic commitments are turned to God, away from the abominable objects and principles that he once served. This change in his first principle of thought and conduct generates a rippling effect that transforms the entire spectrum of his worldview and lifestyle.

Regeneration, or being "born again,"<sup>35</sup> occurs in conjunction with God's effectual call toward his chosen ones (1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18), and enables them to respond in faith and repentance toward Christ. This means that regeneration precedes faith; that is, a person is not born again by faith, but he is enabled to believe because God has first regenerated him. Faith is not the precondition of regeneration; rather, regeneration is the precondition of faith.

The reason some Christians think that regeneration occurs by faith is because they have confused regeneration with "salvation" in general, and with "justification" in particular. When the word "salvation" is applied to the sinner, it is a general term that implies a number of things, such as the items discussed in this chapter. In justification God confers upon the elect the righteousness merited by Christ. The Bible teaches that we are *justified* by faith, and not that we are *regenerated* by faith. Confusion results when one considers justification and regeneration as both referring to "salvation" in the same sense.

Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, no one can *see* the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). The word "see" here refers to the ability to understand, or "see into." Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "The god of this age has *blinded the minds* of unbelievers, so that they *cannot see* the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." If they cannot "see" the gospel, they cannot accept it, which in turn makes it impossible for them to be saved.

Matthew 13:15 makes a similar point: "For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would

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<sup>33</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *The Ministry of the Word*.

<sup>34</sup> It is "radical" in the sense that it affects the very root of a person's personality.

<sup>35</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *Born Again*.

heal them." Or, as Mark 4:12 says, "Otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" Only when one is able to *see* will he *understand*, and only when one *understands* will he be able to *turn*, that is, be "converted" (Matthew 13:15, KJV). If it is necessary to "see" before one has faith, and if the ability to "see" is only possible after regeneration (John 3:3), then naturally regeneration comes before faith.

To review, God has chosen a number of individuals to receive salvation. Christ came to this earth and paid the price of sin for these chosen ones. Each of the elect is summoned to believe the gospel at specific times appointed by God. However, since the elect are born sinners, there is present within them a strong disposition toward evil, which renders them unable and unwilling to respond. Therefore, God regenerates the elect sinners as he summons them, and places in each of them a new nature that is disposed toward God and righteousness. Thus regeneration is a MONERGISTIC work – it is a work of God that produces its effects without any cooperation from the one being saved.

John 1:12-13 refers to the monergistic nature of regeneration: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (NASB). The passage indicates that regeneration does not occur by belonging to a particular bloodline, nor does it occur by "human decision" (v. 13, NIV). A popular view of regeneration is that through a "decision" for Christ, man can become born again, and thus saved from sin. However, Scripture teaches that regeneration is wholly a work of God that he effects in his chosen ones, and that it does not occur through the will of man: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

It is obvious that regeneration must precede faith if we keep in mind that man is spiritually dead before regeneration (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 3:10-12, 23). Because of the mind's hostility to the things of God before regeneration, by themselves the chosen ones would never come to faith in Christ when presented with the gospel. God is the one who acts first, and having changed their disposition from evil to good, and from darkness to light, they then respond to the gospel by faith in Christ, and they are revealed as justified before God. Acts 16:14 records the conversion of Lydia, and the verse says that it was God who first "opened her heart" so that she could "respond to Paul's message."

### **CONVERTED**

After God has regenerated him, the elect individual "sees" the truth of the gospel and responds to the effectual call as he undergoes CONVERSION, which consists of repentance and faith. The message of Jesus to the people was, "*Repent and believe* the good news!" (Mark 1:15). And he reprimanded "the chief priests and the elders of the people," that they did not "*repent and believe*" (Matthew 21:23, 32) under the ministry of John the Baptist.

The word "conversion" signifies a turning, and includes both repentance and faith. *Repentance* is the part of conversion in which a person turns from sin, while *faith* is

where he turns to Christ for salvation. The close connection between repentance and faith is also indicated in Hebrews 6:1, where it says the "elementary teachings about Christ" consists of "repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God." The writer calls this the "foundation" or beginning of the Christian life.

In REPENTANCE, the sinner first comes to a true intellectual realization of his sinful condition. Since God has already regenerated him, he finds this sinful condition repugnant and determines to turn from both the lifestyle consisting of sins and the individual acts of sins.

Repentance is volitional and not emotional. Although intense emotions may accompany the turning of the mind, it is not a necessary or defining element. Of course, a mental state that consists of nothing more than an emotional upheaval over one's sins and shortcomings without a volitional act of turning does not constitute repentance, and therefore is not associated with faith and justification.

Conversion does not result only in a negative change, in which a person turns from sins and idols, but Paul states that the elect individual also turns "to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Moreover, a definite and biblical system of theology has been added to the person's thinking, and replaces the former unbiblical worldview. This aspect of conversion is called FAITH.

Theologians often propose that faith consists of three elements: knowledge, assent, and trust. However, the truth is that faith consists of only knowledge and assent, and trust is only shorthand for assent.

KNOWLEDGE in our context refers to the intellectual retention and comprehension of biblical propositions. This is a necessary element of faith since it is impossible to believe something without knowing what to believe. If a person does not know what X represents, he cannot answer the question, "Do you believe in X?" Faith is impossible without knowledge.

God grants knowledge to an individual as the first element of saving faith usually through the preaching or presentation of the gospel. As Paul writes, "And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14). Knowledge also implies understanding in this case. Just as it is impossible to believe in X while it remains undefined, a person cannot believe in something while the definition is not understood. Since the gospel is always presented in propositional form, the knowledge and understanding necessary for faith refer to the mental retention and comprehension of the gospel propositions.

ASSENT is intellectual agreement to the understood propositions. Although anyone may gain some understanding of the gospel message, not everyone will agree with it. It is easy for a person to explain the biblical teaching on the resurrection of Christ, but whether the hearer will agree that it really occurred is a different matter. The evil disposition of the unregenerate mind prevents a person from assenting to the gospel regardless of the

preacher's persuasiveness. Therefore, one must first be regenerated by God, so as to gain a new disposition that is favorable to the gospel, after which he will readily assent to the gospel.

Since many theologians think that the non-elect can truly assent to the gospel without "personal trust" in Christ, they also argue that knowledge and assent are insufficient to save. Rather, one must add to knowledge and assent the third element of TRUST, which they define as a personal and relational reliance on the person of Christ. Whereas trust entails commitment, somehow assent does not. They say that although the objects of knowledge and assent are propositions, the object of trust must be a person, namely, Christ. That is, saving faith believes in Christ as a person, and not only a set of propositions.

Although not all theologians distinguish faith into these three elements, many of them define it in ways that amount to claiming that saving faith must move from the intellectual to the relational, the propositional to the personal, and from assent to trust. To them, assent corresponds to a "believe *that*" faith, while trust is a "believe *in*" faith. Assent believes *that* certain things *about* Christ are true, but trust goes beyond that to believe *in* the *person* of Christ. Faith is belief *in* a person, not facts *about* the person. They point to passages demanding a faith that believes *in* the gospel. For example, Acts 16:31 says, "Believe *in* the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved," and 1 John 3:23 says, "This is his command: to believe *in* the name of his Son, Jesus Christ."

However, there are conclusive reasons to reject this distinction between assent and trust, and instead to affirm that faith consists only of knowledge and assent.

First, the Bible does not exclusively use the "believe in" type of language when referring to faith. For example, Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe *that* he exists and *that* he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The verse demands that one who comes to God must assent to two propositions. He must believe *that* (1) "God exists," and *that* (2) "God rewards those who earnestly seek him." The writer says that this kind of faith can "please God," and that "the ancients were commended for" having it (v. 2).

Second, the New Testament indicates that to believe *in* Christ means to believe *that* certain propositions are true:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: *that* Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, *that* he was buried, *that* he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and *that* he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.  
(1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

Third, an analysis of language demonstrates that believing *in* (or "trust") a person is nothing other than shorthand for believing *that* (or "assent") certain propositions about him are true.

There are at least two ways to understand the question, "Do you believe *in* the devil?" It may be asking whether one believes *that* the devil exists, or whether he believes *that* the devil is worthy of worship. That is, the question implies one of the two propositions, and asks a person to affirm or deny it. A Christian would affirm the first and deny the second. However, unless the context of the conversation establishes the meaning of the question, or unless the person makes an assumption as to the meaning of the question, it is impossible to tell which of the two propositions is intended.

If D = "the devil," e = "exists," and w = "worthy of worship," then "I believe *in* D" may mean either "I believe *that* D<sub>e</sub>" or "I believe *that* D<sub>w</sub>." Either way, "I believe *in* D" must represent either of the two "believe *that*" statements, and thus it is nothing more than shorthand for one of them. By itself, the meaning is undefined.

Likewise, the meaning of "I believe *in* God" is undefined unless it is reduced to one or more "believe *that*" propositions. In the context of Hebrews 11:6, if G = "God," e = "exists," and r = "rewarder," then "I believe *in* G" appears to have three possible meanings:

1. "I believe *that* G<sub>e</sub>"
2. "I believe *that* G<sub>r</sub>"
3. "I believe *that* G<sub>e</sub> + G<sub>r</sub>"

Hebrews 11:6 calls for a faith that affirms (3).<sup>36</sup> It is certainly a "believe *that*" kind of faith, but no one can please God without it. Also, note that to believe *in* X may imply a "believe *that*" faith in multiple propositions. In Hebrews 11:6, to have faith means to believe *that* G<sub>e</sub> + G<sub>r</sub>.

Therefore, we conclude that "I believe *in* X" is shorthand for "I believe *that* X<sub>1</sub> + X<sub>2</sub> + X<sub>3</sub>...X<sub>n</sub>." This means that to believe or have faith *in* something or someone is to believe or have faith *that* certain propositions about that something or someone are true. To have faith *in* God and *in* Christ is precisely to believe something *about* them – to have a "believe *that*" faith. Some people might consider it more pious or intimate to say that faith must go beyond the intellectual and that faith is belief or trust in a person instead of assent to propositions, but this idea of faith is meaningless. A faith that does not "believe *that*" certain propositions are true does not believe anything at all; the content of this so-called faith is undefined. There is, in fact, no faith.

James 2:19 is often used to oppose the view that faith is only intellectual and propositional. The verse states, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder." Supposedly, this verse indicates that although it is good to "believe *that* there is one God," in that it is assent to a true proposition, but it is not a saving faith. Even the demons, and by implication the non-elect, may have this kind

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<sup>36</sup> It would seem that a person cannot believe that God is one who rewards those who seek him without first believing that God exists. Therefore, it is impossible to affirm (2) by itself, unless the meaning is that God *would be* one who rewards those who seek him *if* (1) was true.

of "faith," and therefore a mere intellectual agreement to the gospel might not amount to the kind of faith that saves. However, this interpretation completely ignores the teaching of the passage. It kidnaps the words of a text, severs it from its meaning, and reintroduces it to assert something different.

Verse 17 says, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." James asserts that some people claim to have faith, but there is something missing from their faith. The missing element that he has in mind is action or good works. In other words, if 2:19 is used to show that assent to propositions constitutes an insufficient faith, then the same verse would teach that the missing ingredient is works, not trust, or commitment, or any such thing. This also means that those who use the verse for this purpose has, by implication, repudiated justification by faith. If they really do this, then they are not even Christians, and they would have no right to instruct anyone about true faith. The verse does not support the point that they wish to make.

Paul has explained that justification is by faith alone apart from works. James does not disagree with him, but he has a different emphasis. True faith results in behavior that corresponds. The demons "believe" that there is one God, but they do not act in a way that is consistent with it. Instead of worshiping him as God, they shudder and continue to resist him. James never suggests that the alternative to the "faith" of demons is some sort of personal trust. But he teaches that true faith produces actions that correspond to the assent claimed. And this makes it necessary to include in our definition of faith that true assent implies obedience to the teachings and implications of the propositions affirmed. Thus to believe *that* "There is one God" implies that one should worship him, since he is the ultimate being that is inherently worthy of worship. That the demons do not worship "God" implies that they either refuse to acknowledge the full meaning of the word, or they, fully aware of its implications, refuse to grant complete assent to the proposition.

Sinclair Ferguson reflects the widespread confusion about assent and trust:

Faith is more than assent, but it is never less than assent. Thomas' faith in the risen Christ was assent to the fact of the resurrection. But it was more. It was a heart which acknowledged, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).<sup>37</sup>

However, "acknowledge" is just another word for "assent," and we have previously established that the heart is the mind or intellect. So there is no difference between, "A heart which acknowledged," and "A mind which assented." His distinction is pious-sounding but meaningless. Further, "My Lord and my God!" is not a person but a proposition. Therefore, in his confusion, Ferguson unintentionally agrees with us that Thomas' faith amounts to "A mind which assented to a proposition," and that faith is not "more" than assent.

All of the above considerations result in a biblical definition of faith. Since the nature of faith is assent to knowledge, since this knowledge denotes a retention and understanding

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<sup>37</sup> Ferguson, *The Christian Life*; p. 66.

of certain propositions, and since the source of these propositions is revelation, or the Bible, *faith is voluntary and intelligent assent to biblical or revealed propositions*, and *assent* implies obedience to the demands inherently present in the propositions. While *saving* faith consists of assent to certain propositions related to the redemptive work of Christ, biblical faith in general continues to abide and develop in the Christian as he assents to these same propositions along with other ones in the Bible, and in this manner he grows in spiritual maturity.

Instead of using the word "trust" to distinguish true and false faith, we need to distinguish *true* assent from *false* assent, or true faith from false faith. True assent means an intellectual agreement with propositions that results in obedience to the implications of the propositions. On the other hand, a person with false assent to biblical propositions claims that he agrees with them but does not produce the thinking, speech, and conduct necessarily implied by such an agreement.

Salvation by grace through faith is a gift from God: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Faith cannot be manufactured by man, but it can only be given to him. This is consistent with the monergistic nature of salvation, that from election to regeneration, and now to repentance and faith, salvation is solely the work of God and not of man. Therefore, no one may boast about his conversion and his faith in the gospel.

Without God's work of regeneration in which he changes the disposition and volition of man, no one can or will truly assent to the biblical propositions about God and Christ. Our definition indicates that faith has a volitional element, in that it is a *voluntary* assent to the gospel. The will of the unregenerate man cannot assent to the gospel, but a person who has been regenerated by God has also been *made* willing to believe in Jesus Christ; God has changed his will. Therefore, God does not "compel" a person to faith in the sense of forcing him to believe what he consciously refuses to accept, but God "compels" a change in the person's will by regeneration so that his assent to the gospel is indeed voluntary. That is, faith is voluntary in the sense that the elect person indeed decides to accept the gospel, but he only does this because God causes him to so decide. Without God's power to "compel" or to change the will, no one would decide to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, Jesus says in John 7:17, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." But Romans 8:7 says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor *can* it do so." Since the sinful mind *cannot* submit to God, it must mean that the person who "chooses to do God's will" has already been changed by God, so that his disposition is no longer sinful but righteous. He then willingly chooses to do the will of God, and becomes able to discern that the gospel is true. This again shows that regeneration must precede faith, and that faith itself is a gift from God.



## JUSTIFIED

Christians are accustomed to the idea that "salvation" comes by faith, especially in opposition to works. Although faith is applied to every aspect of the Christian life, it has special relevance when it comes to the justification of God's chosen ones. JUSTIFICATION is an act of God by which he imputes the righteousness of Christ to the elect person, and declares that this elect person is righteous on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, it is a forensic righteousness credited to the believer as a gift, and not a righteousness achieved by the elect's own good works.

Since justification refers to Christ's righteousness credited to the elect, and precedes many of the other items in the application of redemption, in a sense, one is not in error who says that faith leads to the subsequent items in the order of salvation to which justification is the precondition. And of course, faith is directly applied to all these aspects of salvation as well. For example, Acts 26:18 says that the elect are "*sanctified* by faith." Nevertheless, regeneration precedes both faith and justification. It is never said to follow from faith or to be the result of faith, and it is never confused with justification. The logical order is regeneration, then faith, then justification.

God had chosen certain individuals to receive salvation, and he sent Jesus Christ to die for them and to pay for their sins. He has appointed a time for each of these chosen ones to be summoned and converted. This is when he changes their sinful disposition to one that delights in his will and laws. Along with this new nature, God causes them to respond with faith toward the gospel, and he declares that they have been made righteous on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, God is the one who regenerates us, who summons us to faith, who creates and causes faith in us, and who then declares us righteous. Salvation is wholly a work of God.

Scripture asserts that justification is by faith and not works. Passages in support of this include:

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:39)

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus...For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. (Romans 3:20-24, 28)

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (Romans 4:4-5)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2)

Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)

In light of the biblical emphasis on justification by faith alone, especially in the writings of Paul, some people are confused by some of the verses in James 2. For example, verse 24 says, "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." But the difficulty disappears when we note how the term is used and pay attention to the context.

We are discussing how one word is used by two different biblical writers. Although all the writers of Scripture agree in theology, they do not always use the same words to express the same concepts, and they do not always use the same words with exactly the same meaning or emphasis. To illustrate, although John does not use the word "justification," his writings teach that a person is saved by faith alone just as strongly as the writings of Paul.<sup>38</sup> We will list only several examples here:

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:18)

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28-29)

But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die

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<sup>38</sup> We can find another example in the doctrine of election. John emphasizes the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation just as much as Paul, but the two use different words to teach the same doctrine.

in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins." (John 8:23-24)

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)

Keeping in mind that the same word may be used with different meanings by different biblical writers, Robert Reymond offers a sound explanation:

Whereas Paul intends by "justified" the *actual* act on God's part whereby he pardons and imputes righteousness to the ungodly, James intends by "justified" the verdict God *declares* when the *actually* (previously) justified man has *demonstrated* his actual righteous state by obedience and good works....

Whereas Paul, when he repudiates "works," is referring to "the works of the law," that is, any and every work of *whatever* kind done for the sake of acquiring merit, James intends by "works" acts of kindness toward those in need performed as the fruit and evidence of the actual justified state and a true and vital faith (James 2:14-17)....

And whereas Paul believed with all his heart that men are justified by *faith alone*, he insists as strongly as James that such faith, *if alone*, is not true but dead faith: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. [What counts] is faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6), which is hardly different in meaning from James's expression: "faith was working together with [Abraham's] works, and by works his faith was perfected" (James 2:22). Paul can also speak of the Christian's "work of faith" (1 Thess. 1:3). And in the very context where he asserts that we are saved by grace through faith and "not by works," Paul can declare that we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10). In sum, whereas for James "faith without works in dead," for Paul "faith working through love" is inevitable if it is true faith.<sup>39</sup>

Paul wanted to show that justification in the sense of the initial declaration of righteousness by God comes only by faith in the work of Christ, but James was more concerned with showing that if such faith does not result in a righteous lifestyle, then it is not true faith in the first place, and the declaration of righteousness by God never happened. Since one is saved not *by* good works but *for* good works (Ephesians 2:10), a person does not need to produce good works to be saved, but if he does not produce good works after he claims to be saved, then he has never been saved.

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<sup>39</sup> Reymond, *Systematic Theology*; p. 750.

Thus James did not deny that forensic righteousness comes by faith alone – that was not his topic – but he wanted to challenge his readers to demonstrate that their faith was genuine: "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (James 2:18). His emphasis was not in how one attains forensic righteousness, but how one who claims to have attained this righteousness should behave: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

The forensic nature of justification means that the righteousness credited to the chosen ones is an **IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS** rather than an **INFUSED RIGHTEOUSNESS**. God sent Jesus Christ to pay for the sins of the elect, then he grants faith to them as the means by which he credits the righteousness of Christ to them. The righteousness bestowed is thus not one that they have produced by themselves, but one that has been achieved by Christ and given to them as a gift. Therefore, when we affirm that justification is *by faith alone*, we do not mean that faith *as such* saves or justifies us, but we mean that justification is not by our own efforts, which can never attain righteousness. Rather, we mean that our justification is *by Christ alone*, who has attained righteousness for us.

Since justification involves a forensic declaration, it is an instantaneous act, and in the mind of God, an eternal act. A person is either justified or unjustified. He does not gradually become justified, but he is revealed as justified through Jesus Christ when he professes faith in the gospel. Therefore, the concept of justification excludes the process by which the Christian grows in knowledge and holiness, which comes under sanctification. Christians who affirm justification by faith alone sometimes still confuse imputed righteousness and infused righteousness. Justification is imputed righteousness, and sanctification is infused righteousness. Justification is a forensic declaration of righteousness, but sanctification, when used in the progressive sense, refers to one's spiritual development after justification.<sup>40</sup>

### **ADOPTED**

**ADOPTION** is an act of God by which he inducts the elect into his family. Now, recall that Jesus calls the elect his sheep even before they believed in him. In this sense, God thinks of the elect as his people before the elect themselves are awakened to faith and righteousness. So when we refer to justification, adoption, and so on, as if these are things that occur in history, we do not deny that God has already decided them in eternity.

Some people think that every human being is a child of God. Against this misconception, the Bible teaches that every non-Christian is a child of the devil:

The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one. (Matthew 13:38)

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<sup>40</sup> For more on justification and sanctification, see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Ephesians* and *Commentary on Philippians*.

Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (John 6:70)

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? (Acts 13:10)

He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. (1 John 3:8)

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:10)

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. (1 John 3:12)

On the other hand, those who are saved by Christ have also been made the children of God:

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8:14-17, NASB)

Perhaps this doctrine has been so diluted and abused in Christian circles and in the world that we are not as in awe with it as we should be. But it is no small matter to be called the children and heirs of God: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him" (1 John 3:1).

An important implication of adoption into the family of God is that we may now relate to him as our Heavenly Father, and that we may now have fellowship with other Christians as true family members. In fact, the bond between Christians is stronger than that which exists between natural family members. We have been bound together by the will of God, the blood of Christ, and a common faith.

Most people assume that the Bible teaches us to treat other people in an impartial way. For example, a person should not offer special treatment to a rich man just because he is rich (James 2:1-9). However, the Bible does not teach that we must treat all people alike; rather, we are to give Christians the priority: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, *especially* to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). Christians come first when receiving charity and other forms of assistance.

We must avoid confusing adoption with other items in the benefits of redemption. For example, regeneration is spiritual resurrection, which enables the individual to respond positively to God, but a person does not become a child of God by it. It is possible for a rational creature to be spiritually alive without being a member of God's family in the sense denoted by adoption. Angels may be an example of this class of beings.

In addition, adoption is not justification. It would be possible for God to declare a person as righteous without also making this person a son by adoption. One who has been regenerated and justified already stands righteous before God, and will never be condemned (Romans 8:33). The doctrine of adoption further enlightens us as to the extent of God's love toward his chosen ones, that in addition to saving them from sin and hell, he would make them his children and heirs.

Several items in the benefits of redemption have been distorted to denote deification. The doctrines of regeneration and glorification are especially prone to abuse. A proper understanding of adoption should help us avoid this error. One preacher said:

Peter said it just as plain, he said, "We are partakers of the divine nature." That nature is life eternal in absolute perfection. And that was imparted, injected into your spirit man, and you have that imparted into you by God just the same as you imparted into your child the nature of humanity. That child wasn't born a whale! [It was] born a human. Isn't that true? Well, now, you don't *have* a human, do you? You *are* one. You don't *have* a god in you. You *are* one.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Kenneth Copeland, "The Force of Love" (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries), cassette tape #02-0028. Cited in John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Choas*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992; p. 331. When Paul Crouch said, "I *am* a little god!" Copeland responded, "Yes! Yes!" Again, when Crouch said, "I *am* a little god! Critic, be gone!" Copeland responded, "You are anything that He is." *Ibid.*, p. 332-333.

This preacher either meant something other than the words appear to say, which implies extreme carelessness and utter disregard for the preaching ministry, or more likely, he meant what he says, which constitutes blasphemy of the most horrific kind. In other words, if this was just a bad choice of words, then it was a *very* bad choice of words; if it was a good choice of words, then it was a *very* blasphemous doctrine. Either error is sufficient to result in his dismissal from the ministry, if not excommunication from the church.

Jesus is God's "one and only Son" (John 3:16; see also John 3:18, 1 John 4:9); he has a unique place before God and a unique relationship with God. We are God's *adopted* children, and regeneration did not make us part of the Trinity! Salvation is not deification. The fact that Jesus is also referred to as the "*firstborn*" (Romans 8:29) denotes his preeminence among God's creation and his elect, and does not mean that we are God's subsequent children in the same sense and in the same order of God the Son. For example, Colossians 1:15 says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." This does not mean that the universe and the planets are also God's children.

## **SANCTIFIED**

Theologians use the word SANCTIFICATION in two senses. DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION refers to the Christian's instant and decisive break from the dominion of sin when he comes to faith in Christ. God has consecrated and separated him from the world. But in this section, we are interested in PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION, which refers to the Christian's gradual growth in knowledge and holiness, so that having received *forensic* righteousness in justification, he may now develop *personal* righteousness in his thought and conduct.

Some people make the mistake of thinking that the whole of sanctification is like justification in the sense that it is an immediate act of God whereby he causes us to achieve perfect holiness in thought and conduct, and this implies that true Christians no longer commit sins. However, although sanctification begins at regeneration, the Bible describes it as a growth process, so that a person increasingly thinks and behaves in a way that pleases God, and that conforms to the likeness of Christ.

A number of passages in the Bible may give the impression that a person ceases to sin altogether after regeneration. For example, John says, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). But this verse is only saying that one who is born of God does not continue in sin, and not that he does not sin at all. In fact, earlier John writes, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1:8). A regenerated person should exhibit a definite transformation in his thought and conduct. Perfection is not in view, but an unmistakable turn from evil thinking and living toward holy thinking and living.

In the same letter, the apostle says, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense –

Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). The atoning work of Christ has effectively paid for not only those sins we had committed before regeneration, but also those subsequent to it. However, John does not write this to grant us the liberty to sin, but instead he says, "I write this to you so that you *will not* sin." The verse also shows that he does not assume that the Christian has achieved sinless perfection, since he makes provision for one who does sin, saying, "But *if* anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense."

Hebrews 12:4 presents sanctification as partly a "struggle against sin," but the Bible also tells us it is one that we can win. Paul writes:

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:13-14)

Sin is not our master, so we do not need to obey it. We have been set free from sin so that we may now live righteous lives.

As with all the areas of our spiritual life, the way we grow in holiness involves the intellect and volition, or the understanding and the will. Peter writes, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the *knowledge* of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our *knowledge* of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:2-3). We grow in spiritual maturity first through knowledge. It would be impossible to shun wickedness and pursue righteousness without a clear conception of what wickedness and righteousness mean, and what kinds of thoughts and actions come under each. As for our volition, Paul writes, "*Count* yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11).

As with all the items that this chapter discusses, sanctification is a work of God; however, it is SYNERGISTIC in nature, meaning that it is also in a sense a work of man, and involves his conscious decision and effort in the process. As Paul writes:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:12-13)<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The word "salvation" should not be confused with justification, since Paul is not speaking of attaining forensic righteousness before God. Regeneration, justification, sanctification, and so forth all come under the general term "salvation," and the context determines in what sense the term is used. Here Paul admonishes the believers to exert conscious effort in their spiritual growth, or sanctification.



The Christian is to actively take his part in sanctification, and deliberately pursue a life of obedience to God "in fear and trembling." Nevertheless, the passage explains that even the working out of our salvation is in fact a work of God: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Our choices and actions remain under God's control after regeneration. Therefore, although a person is conscious of his efforts and struggles in sanctification, in the end God receives the honor, and the Christian still has no basis to boast of his achievements.

## **PRESERVED**

All those who undergo one phase of the application of redemption also experience the next phase. For example, all whom God has predestined, he also summons to salvation in due time. Now, Romans 8:30 says, "Those he *justified*, he also *glorified*." This means that all those who receive justification will also receive glorification; no one who is justified will failed to be glorified. Since glorification refers to the consummation of God's saving work in the chosen ones, this means that once a person has been justified, his forensic righteousness will never be lost. Since all those who are justified will also be glorified, true Christians will never lose their salvation.

This doctrine is often called the PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS, and also ETERNAL SECURITY in some circles. These terms are accurate, since true Christians do consciously persevere in faith and the elect are indeed eternally secure in their salvation. However, many biblical passages on this topic emphasize that it is God who actively preserves the Christian from the beginning to the end of his salvation, that Jesus is "the *author* and *perfecter* of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). This being the case, PRESERVATION is a better term. It reflects the fact that God is the one who truly maintains the Christian's salvation, and not the believer himself.

To favor the perspective of preservation does not deny that the Christian must deliberately improve and consciously struggle to persevere. It is unbiblical to say that since it is God who keeps us, then there is no need for us to exercise any conscious effort in our spiritual development. "Let go, and let God," a popular phrase that probably came from the Keswick movement, is unbiblical when it comes to sanctification. However, the word "preservation" helps to remind us that it is God who grants and causes any improvement and stability in our growth in knowledge and holiness, even if we are very aware of the efforts that we exert toward our spiritual development.

There are many biblical passages teaching that God preserves those whom he has chosen, regenerated, and justified:

I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. (Jeremiah 32:40)

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is

the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. (John 6:37-39)

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. (John 10:28-29)

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:8)

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. (2 Timothy 1:12)

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:18)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ. (Jude 1)

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)

The doctrine of preservation does not say that anyone who makes a profession of faith in Christ is then saved and will never be lost – the person's profession of faith may be false. Rather, the doctrine teaches that *true* Christians will never be lost. They will never permanently turn from Christ, although some of them may even fall deeply into sin for a time.

A true Christian is one who has given true assent to the gospel, and whose "sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5) becomes evident through a lasting transformation of his thoughts, speech, and behavior in conformity to the demands of Scripture. John says that one who is regenerated "cannot go on sinning" (1 John 3:9). On the other hand, a person who produces a profession of Christ out of a false assent to the gospel may last "only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away" (Matthew 13:21).

Sometimes even a true Christian may fall into serious sin, but such a fall is never permanent. Nevertheless, as long as a person persists in a sinful lifestyle, we have no reason to believe his profession of faith, and therefore should think of him as an unbeliever. Jesus teaches that a stubborn refusal to repent is sufficient reason for excommunication:

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (Matthew 18:15-17)

Since he is regarded as an unbeliever, he cannot be a candidate for marriage by a Christian, he cannot participate in communion, and he cannot hold ministerial responsibilities. He may indeed be a true Christian, but there is no way to be certain of this while he remains in sin. Instead, he should be treated as a non-Christian, along with all the implications of such an assumption. "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10).

Those who permanently fall away and refuse to repent have never been truly saved. John says, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us" (1 John 2:19).

Judas appeared to follow Jesus for several years, but Jesus says, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (John 6:70). And verse 64 explains, "For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him." So it was not that Judas had true faith, and then fell into sin and lost his salvation; rather, he never had true faith at all. Jesus chose Judas knowing that he would be the traitor: "While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled" (John 17:12). This verse presupposes divine election, and explicitly teaches the doctrines of preservation and reprobation. Jesus preserved the eleven, who were among the chosen ones, but Judas was lost because he was never saved in the first place. He was among the reprobates, "doomed to destruction."

On the other hand, those among the elect who appear to fall from their faith nevertheless retain their salvation, and they will return to Christ according to God's power to preserve them. For example, even before Peter denied Christ, he was told, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). It is true that if a person's faith is truly lost, then he has also lost his salvation; however, this does not happen because God himself prevents the faith of his elect from failing. And just as Jesus prayed for Peter, now he prays for all Christians, so that no matter what spiritual problems they face, their faith will not fail:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. (John 17:20)

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

Jesus made no such prayer for Judas, but he prays only for his chosen ones: "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours" (John 17:9).

One of the most common objections to this doctrine states that if it is true that the Christians cannot lose his salvation, then this constitutes a license to sin. The Christian may sin all he wants, and still remain secure in Christ. The answer is that a true Christian does not wish to live in sin, although he may occasionally stumble. He detests sin and loves righteousness. A person who sins without restraint is not a Christian at all.

There are a number of biblical passages that command Christians to pursue righteousness and shun wickedness. Some of these passages are so strong in expression and contain

warnings so ominous that some people misinterpret them to teach that it is possible for a true Christian to lose his salvation. For example, Hebrews 6:4-6 says:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

First, whatever the passage means, it does not say that the elect will in fact renounce his faith. Let us assume that the passage indeed says that if a person falls away from faith after reaching a certain stage of spiritual development, he would indeed lose his salvation. This does not challenge the doctrine of preservation – in fact, we may heartily agree with it. If the elect sincerely and permanently renounces Christ, then he loses his salvation. However, we have read a number of verses saying that this will never happen, that the true believer will never sincerely and permanently renounce Christ, and the above passage says nothing to contradict this. John says that those who depart from the faith have never been truly with the faith.

Second, several verses later, the writer explicitly states that what this passage describes will not happen to his readers: "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case – things that accompany salvation" (Hebrews 6:9). To paraphrase, he is saying, "Although we are talking this way, I am sure that when it comes to salvation, this will not happen to you."

Third, God uses various means by which he accomplishes his ends. For example, although he has unchangeably determined the identities of those who would be saved, he does not save these people without means. Rather, he saves the elect by means of the preaching of the gospel, and by means of the faith in Christ that he places within them. God uses various means to accomplish his ends, and he chooses and controls both the means and the ends.

Accordingly, just because we are told that the elect will persevere in faith does not mean that God does not warn them against apostasy. In fact, these warnings about the consequences of renouncing the faith is one of the means by which God will prevent his elect from apostasy. The reprobates will ignore these warnings, but the elect will heed them (John 10:27), and so they will continue to pursue sanctification "with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Concerning the words of God, Psalm 19:11 says, "By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For more on this doctrine, see Vincent Cheung, "The Preservation of the Saints."