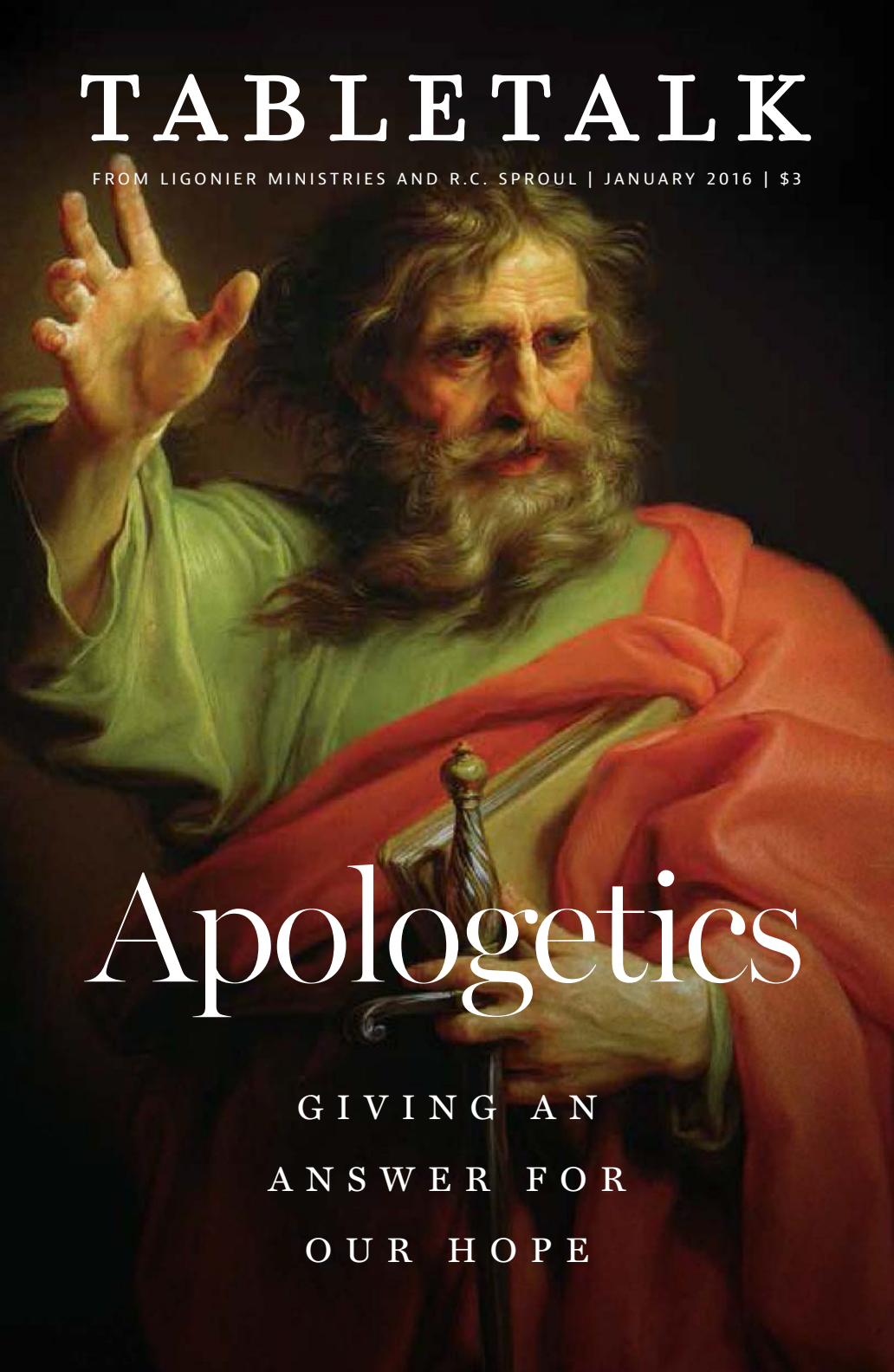


TABLETALK

FROM LIGONIER MINISTRIES AND R.C. SPROUL | JANUARY 2016 | \$3



Apologetics

GIVING AN
ANSWER FOR
OUR HOPE

With Gentleness and Respect

WHEN PEOPLE FIRST hear the word *apologetics*, they typically think of our modern use of the word *apology*. They often conclude that the task of apologetics is apologizing for the Christian faith as if to say we are sorry for our faith. However, the word *apologetics* derives from the Greek word *apologia*, which means “to give an answer” or “to make a defense.” Apologetics is not an apology, it’s an answer—a defense of what we believe. In his first epistle, Peter writes, “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). In his commentary on 1 Peter, Dr. R.C. Sproul writes:

Our preparation is to make us ready to give a defense and a reason for the hope that is in us.... If your neighbor says, “I notice that you are a Christian. What is it that you believe?” are you ready to explain not only what you believe but why you believe it? Some Christians tell those who inquire that we simply take a leap of faith with no bother about the credibility or the rational character of the truth claims of the Bible, but that response goes against the teaching of this text. The only leap of faith we are to take is out of the darkness and into the light. When we become Christians, we do not leave our mind in the parking lot. We are called to think according to the Word of God, to seek the mind of Christ and an understanding of the things set forth in sacred Scripture.

God calls us to be ready to make a defense for the hope that is in us, but notice that He calls us to do it with gentleness and respect. Apologetics isn’t just for some Christians, it is for all Christians. We all must know what we believe, why we believe it, how to live it, how to defend it, and how to proclaim it—and we must do so with gentleness and respect. **T**

BURK PARSONS is editor of *Tabletalk* magazine and serves as copastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Fla. He is editor of the book *Assured By God: Living in the Fullness of God’s Grace*. He is on Twitter @BurkParsons.



Tabletalk (usps 009-013) is published monthly by Ligonier Ministries, Inc., 421 Ligonier Ct, Sanford, FL 32771. Annual subscription price (12 issues): \$23.00. Periodicals postage paid at Lake Mary, FL, and additional mailing offices. **Postmaster: Send address changes to Ligonier Ministries, 421 Ligonier Ct, Sanford, FL 32771.** Unless noted, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation: Required by Title 39 United States Code 3685. Title of publication: Tabletalk. Publication no.: 009013. Date of filing: 10/1/15. Frequency of issue: monthly. No. of issues published annually: 12. Annual subscription price: \$23/yr. usa; \$33/yr. foreign. Location of known office of publication: 421 Ligonier Ct, Sanford, Seminole Co., FL 32771. Mailing address of headquarters: 421 Ligonier Ct, Sanford, FL 32771. Publisher: Ligonier Ministries. Executive Editor: R.C. Sproul. Owner: Ligonier Ministries, a nonprofit educational organization. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: none. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes has not changed during the preceding 12 months. Total no. of copies printed (net press run): average/last year: 88,983; last issue: 94,000. Paid/requested circulation: (1) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales: average/last year: 3,447; last issue: 2,968; (2) Mail subscription: average/last year: 63,796; last issue: 67,202. Free distribution by mail, carrier, or other means: average/last year: 7,676; last issue: 8,180. Total non-requested distribution last year: 8,554; last issue: 5,311. Total distribution: average/last year: 87,687; last issue: 88,206. Copies not distributed: average/last year: 1,296; last issue: 5,794. Total: average/last year: 88,983; last issue: 94,000. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. —Burk Parsons, editor

C O N T E N T S

JANUARY 2016 | VOL. 40 | NO. 1



6
An Apology
for Apologetics
Stephen J. Nichols



12
God
K. Scott Oliphint



20
The Holy
Spirit
Sinclair B. Ferguson



24
The Church
John W. Tweeddale

8
General
Revelation
W. Robert Godfrey

14
Man
Michael S. Horton

22
Salvation
Guy M. Richard

26
The
Resurrection
Guy Prentiss Waters

16
Christ
Keith A. Mathison

STUDIES

- 31 Into the Word
- 33 Lead Us Home
Joe Holland
- 41 Idol Factory
Trillia J. Newbell
- 49 Learn to Say “Thank You”
Richard L. Pratt Jr.
- 55 Asking Questions
Joe Thorn
- 63 People of Faith
Robert Rothwell

COLUMNS

- 4 RIGHT NOW
COUNTS FOREVER
Terms for
the Covenant
R.C. Sproul
- 68 CITY ON A HILL
Living Reasonably
in an Unreasonable Age
Don Bailey
- 72 LAST THINGS
Thinking about Change
Tim Challies
- 66 FOR THE CHURCH
Training Pastors
Iver Martin

COVER AND FEATURES *Saint Paul*, Pompeo Girolamo Batoni, Eighteenth Century



EXECUTIVE EDITOR R.C. Sproul EDITOR Burk Parsons MANAGING EDITOR Thomas Brewer
SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR John W. Tweeddale ASSOCIATE EDITORS Kevin D. Gardner and Robert Rothwell
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT Aaron Garriott DESIGN DIRECTOR José Reyes for Metaleap Creative
MARKETING AND CIRCULATION J.D. Bridges and Motte Brown

Terms for the Covenant

REFORMED THEOLOGY, AS MANY have said, is covenant theology, for the concept of covenant has shaped the development of Reformed thinking. We should expect as much because of our doctrine of sola Scriptura, which says that the Bible is the only infallible authority for Christian faith and practice. Therefore, we want to structure all theological understanding according to Scripture. This demands covenant theology, since covenant is an organizing principle in Scripture.

Given the importance of the biblical doctrine of covenant, all Christians should have at least a basic understanding of what the Bible means by the term *covenant*. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word we translate as “covenant” is *berith*, and it was used for centuries by the ancient Israelites. However, after Alexander the Great conquered the Eastern Mediterranean world and brought with him the Greek language, many Jews became more familiar with Greek than with Hebrew. Consequently, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament was made during the third century B.C. We know this translation as the Septuagint, and it had a tremendous impact on the writers of the Greek New Testament.

One challenge that the Jews who produced the Septuagint faced was the decision about

how best to translate the Hebrew term *berith* or “covenant,” since there wasn’t any Greek word that precisely matched the Hebrew term. Eventually, the word chosen by the Septuagint translators was the Greek word *diathēkē*, and this was adopted by the New Testament writers, who, for the most part used *diathēkē* for the concept of “covenant.”

Some confusion arises here, however, because the Greeks used the word *diathēkē* in the sense of “testament.” That’s because a testament in Greek culture, at least at that time, included several nuances that made it different from the Hebrew concept of covenant. First, in Greek culture, a *diathēkē*—a testament—could be changed at any time by the testator while the testator was still alive. The testator could make up his last will and testament and then get irritated at his heirs and write them out of his will. And that continues to this day, for we know that people are sometimes disinherited, or written out of the will of a friend or family member. But that’s significantly different from a *diathēkē*—a testament or covenant—made by God. When God makes a covenant with His people, He can punish them for covenant breaking, but He never cancels the covenant promises He has made.

Another difference between the Greek understanding of *diathēkē* as a testament and the Hebrew understanding of *berith* as a covenant is that in the Greek world,

the benefits of the testament, or *diathēkē*, did not accrue until after the testator died. Obviously, when God makes a covenant, His people don’t have to wait for Him to die to inherit the blessings of that covenant, because He’s incapable of dying.

Given those two great weaknesses, why did the Septuagint translators and the New Testament authors choose the Greek word *diathēkē* (“testament”) to translate the Hebrew *berith* (“covenant”)? Because it was a better choice than the alternative Greek term—*synthēkē*. That word features the prefix *syn*, which we see in such English terms as synonym, syncretism, and synchronization. It simply means “with.” And the idea of a *synthēkē* in Greek culture was an agreement between

equal partners, an agreement with the consent of peers. The Jewish translators wanted to maintain that the covenants that God makes with His people are made between a superior and a subordinate, not between two equal parties. So, the word *synthēkē* was rejected.

The Septuagint translators and New Testament authors chose *diathēkē* because in its original use, before the Greeks came to use it to mean “testament,” it had reference to what is called “the disposition for one’s self.” A *diathēkē* had to do with an individual’s disposition of his goods or property for himself; that is, it referred to his sovereign determining of his heirs. To this day, that’s how we understand the concept of a testament or will. That aspect of disposition is an element that reflects the Hebrew concept because in His covenant, God sovereignly determines to give promises to whom He will give promises.

He made a covenant with Abraham, not Hammurabi. He chose the Jews, not the Philistines. He entered into a covenant relationship with them and said, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” That’s a choice God made, not the Jews. So, even though the Greek word *diathēkē* includes aspects that don’t overlap with the Hebrew notion of a covenant, it carries the key notion of sovereign determination.

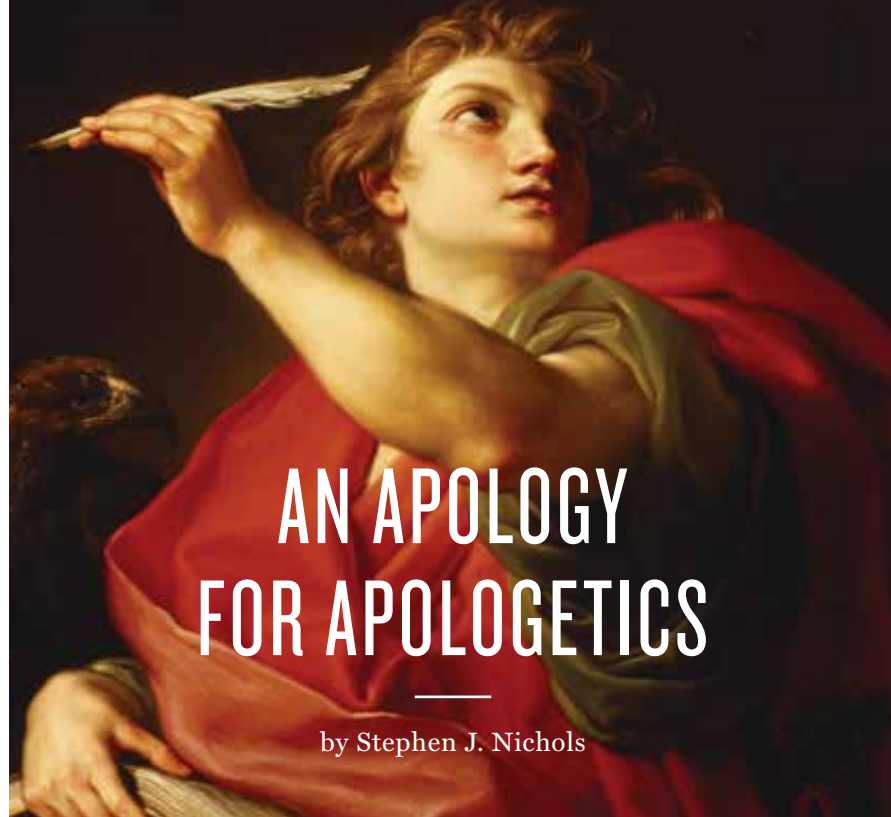
This might seem pedantic, but there’s one important point to take away from this discussion. If God’s covenant were a *synthēkē* made between two equal parties, all would be lost. Our role in maintaining the covenant relationship would be fully equal to His. But we are sinners who cannot keep covenant perfect-

ly. A *synthēkē* would mean no salvation. A *diathēkē* is different. Because it is God’s sovereign administration with an unequal party, the onus for the fulfillment of the covenant’s promises is on the greater party—the Lord Himself. He swore by Himself to uphold the covenant (Gen. 15; Heb. 6:13–20). His honor is on the line, and if He fails, His glory suffers. But we know that God cannot fail, that He will not surrender His glory (Isa. 48:11). In the Lord’s *diathēkē*, or covenant, He guarantees the fulfillment of His Word for His name’s sake, which means the redemption of His people is secure. **T**



DR. R.C. SPROUL is copastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Fla., and the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries. He is author of more than ninety books, including

The Promises of God and Scripture Alone.



AN APOLOGY FOR APOLOGETICS

by Stephen J. Nichols

SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST, POMPEO GIROLAMO BOTANI, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

My professor of apologetics in seminary told stories of odd reactions he received when he would tell people what he did for a living. The best story involved a bank loan officer. When he told the loan officer that he was a professor of apologetics, she replied, “That’s wonderful.” Then she added, “These days, we really do need to teach people how to say they are sorry.”

The loan officer was both right and wrong. We do need apologetics professors, but apologetics isn’t about saying we’re sorry. Rather, it’s about defending the faith. In fact, defending the faith is so urgent today that we need more than apologetics professors—we need all Christians to realize that they are apologists.

One of Dr. R.C. Sproul’s recent books is titled *Everyone’s a Theologian*. We could say equally that “everyone’s an apologist.” Those who are in Christ and have been brought to see the truth and beauty of the gospel have both the obligation and the privilege to defend it. We are compelled “to give an answer.” We can’t simply rely on the philosophically gifted or the culturally adept to carry the weight here. Everyone is an apologist.

THE COMMAND

The Greek word *apologia* means literally “to speak to.” Over time, it came to mean “to make a defense.” When Athens accused Socrates of being harmful to society, Socrates had to offer his defense. He titled it *Apologia*. He stood before the “men of

Athens,” offering his reasoned defense.

The New Testament uses the word seventeen times. Many instances concern court cases, such as the time Paul appeared before the Jewish Council in Acts 22 and before Festus in Acts 25. Paul also speaks of his imprisonment in Rome as an *apologia* of the gospel (Phil. 1:7, 16).

The classic text for the Greek word *apologia* is 1 Peter 3:15–16. Peter’s first epistle was written to the “exiles” living in Asia Minor, located in modern-day Turkey. These exiled Christians were ostracized for their faith and suffered persecution. They were insulted and slandered. Some of them suffered at the hands of their own family members.

Peter commands these exiles not to live in fear or cower before opposition. Instead, he commands these exiled Christians—and us—to be always ready to make a defense. The main verb “to make a defense,” from the Greek word *apologia*, is in the imperative mood. The imperative mood is used for commands. There’s no procedure for deferment here. The command extends to all of us.

Further, Peter tells how to make our defense. He notes that we should “always be prepared.” That’s a tall order. Questions about our faith tend to come at unexpected times. In order to be always ready, we must know our faith, which means knowing our theology. We must also know our audience. We see this in Paul’s example of being an apologist on Mars Hill in Athens (Acts 17:16–34).

Peter also tells us that we need to make our defense “with gentleness and respect”

(1 Peter 3:15). That’s an even taller order. The word translated “respect” could equally be translated “reverence.” It’s the same word used of how we should approach God. So we exiles are to treat our examiners with gentleness and reverence.

Then there’s verse 16. Peter reminds us that who we are is every bit as crucial as what we say. May the testimony of our lives not put the testimony of our words to shame. Instead, “may our good behavior in Christ” also be our apologetic.

**THOSE WHO
ARE IN CHRIST
AND HAVE BEEN
BROUGHT TO
SEE THE TRUTH
AND BEAUTY
OF THE GOSPEL
HAVE BOTH THE
OBLIGATION AND
THE PRIVILEGE TO
DEFEND IT.**

THE MOMENT

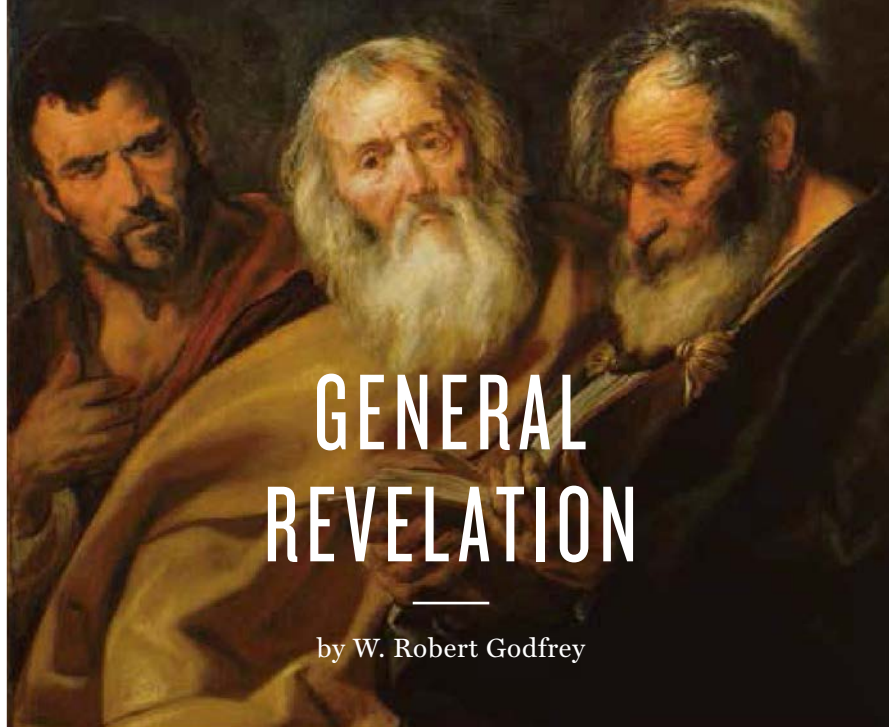
Before Paul stood up and made his defense at Athens, Acts 17:16 records that Paul’s “spirit was provoked within him.”

If someone, especially in the United States, had fallen into a “Rip Van Winkle” sleep in 2011 and awoken five

years later in 2016, he would likely ask, “What happened to my country?” The recent cultural change has been cataclysmic and elicits a response. May our response not be cowardice or compromise. Otherwise, we would violate the command of 1 Peter 3:15–16. We would cease to be the church.

Instead, may our hearts be stirred within us. May we be apologists, confident in the gospel and compassionate toward our persecutors. May we always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us—the only hope for a world in desperate need of the gospel. **TC**

DR. STEPHEN J. NICHOLS is president of Reformation Bible College, chief academic officer of Ligonier Ministries, host of the podcast 5 Minutes in Church History, and author of several books, including *For Us* and *for Our Salvation*.



SAINT MATTHEW AND TWO APOSTLES, JACOB JORDAENS, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Nothing is more important than knowing God as He truly is. For this reason, the church has confessed many truths about our God throughout history. God is the eternal Trinity, the almighty Creator, the wise Sustainer, the effective Redeemer, and the coming Judge. One truth not so clearly articulated in our creeds is that God is the trustworthy Revealer. To know God as He is, He must reveal Himself to us.

Because God is infinite, He cannot be fully comprehended by finite creatures. We are blinded to God's truth by our sin. But even before sin entered the world, we needed God to tell us about Himself. God has always been a revealer of Himself both in His words and in His works. He spoke to Adam in the garden of Eden to reveal Himself and displayed aspects of His character in the works of creation that surrounded Adam. Theologians have called God's

words—spoken at first and later written down—His special revelation, while they have called His works of creation and providence His general revelation. General revelation is, well, general (those theologians know what they are talking about), whereas special revelation is much more specific, detailed, and extensive. Today, general revelation surrounds us in nature, while we possess special revelation in the Bible. Special revelation tells God's people everything revealed about His character in general revelation and much more.

What exactly, then, is general revelation, and why is it significant? Some suggest that the natural sciences are the study of general revelation and so go beyond special revelation. But since the Enlightenment, the natural sciences have typically studied creation not to know God but to know creation, and therefore are not focused on general revelation through creation. Gen-

eral revelation, properly speaking, is God's clear display of His glory and power in the works of creation and providence. As the Scriptures explain: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge" (Ps. 19:1–2). "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:19–20).

Many years ago, Joan Baez, the celebrated folk singer, introduced a song at one of her concerts. She was about to sing "The Dangling Conversation," a song

with the refrain: "Be not too hard, for life is short and nothing is given to man." She told how she had been watching a beautiful sunset with the writer of the song and had asked, "How can you look at such beauty and say that nothing is given to man?" The writer thought a moment and replied, "Well, the beauty is loaned, not really given." The psalmist would have smiled and interjected: "Whether the beauty of the sunset is given or only loaned, it points unmistakably and unavoidably to the Divine One who gives or loans. That is the necessary character of general revelation."

Sinners can resist and deny this general revelation, but they cannot escape it. All nature, all the time, shouts out the existence, power, and splendor of God. Sinners can close their eyes and stop their ears, but general revelation remains plain all around them. Only when the unrighteous actively suppress this plain truth can the

testimony of general revelation be denied. Such suppression is wicked and foolish. So the Scriptures rightly declare: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good" (Ps. 14:1).

This general revelation is an inevitable result of God's works of creation and providence. But what purpose does it serve? In the first place, general revelation is a great

encouragement and support to believers throughout their lives: "Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever" (Ps. 111:2–3). But there is another vital function of general revelation in this fallen world as well. Paul ex-

pressed this function powerfully: "So they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). Sinners are full of excuses: "I would believe if only I could see God or could hear God." Paul says sinners have no legitimate excuses. Those who have rejected God's general revelation would not have profited from His special revelation. Indeed, all of us sinners would reject both forms of God's revelation apart from God's special, merciful work of regeneration in the hearts of His people.

Surely, it would be presumptuous for us to add to the Apostles' Creed. But it might well be an improvement to say: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, the revealer, and the maker of heaven and earth." Praise God the Revealer. 

DR. W. ROBERT GODFREY is president of Westminster Seminary California, a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow, and author of several books, including *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor*.

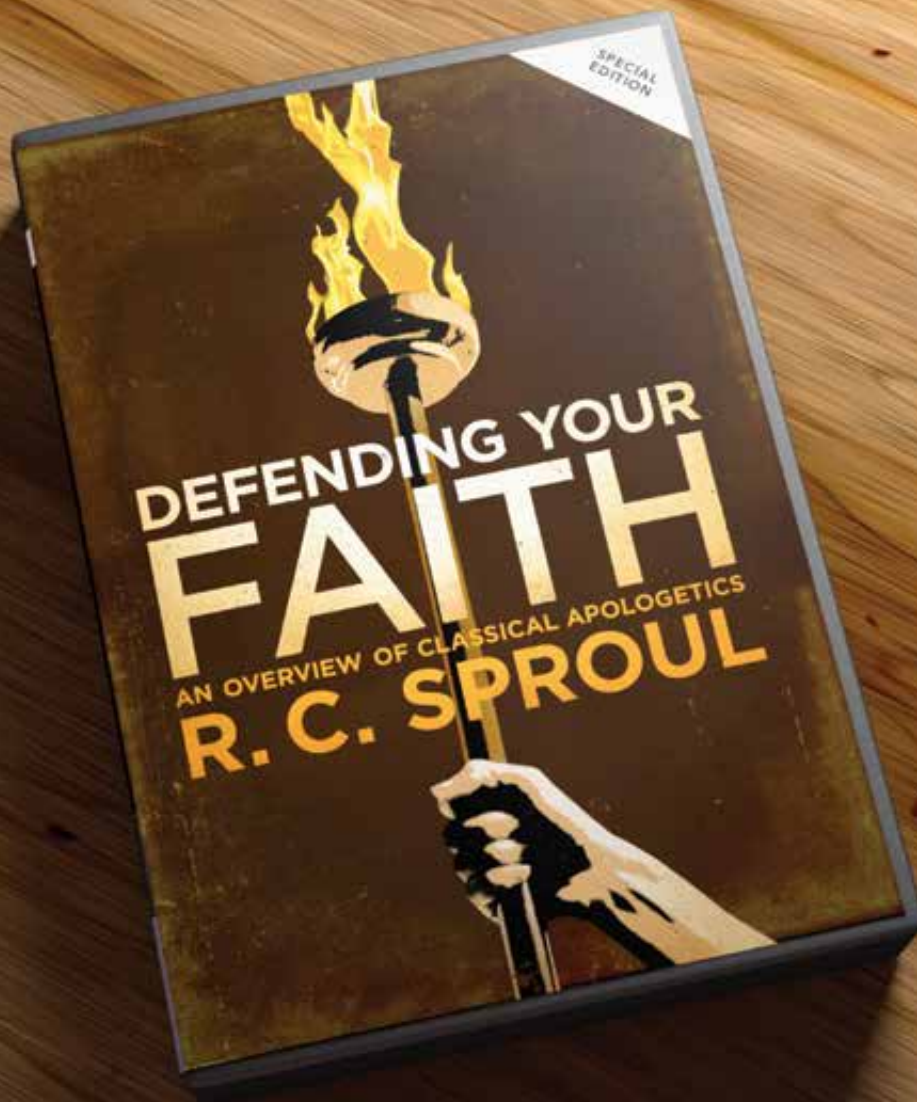
FEATURED
RESOURCE OFFER

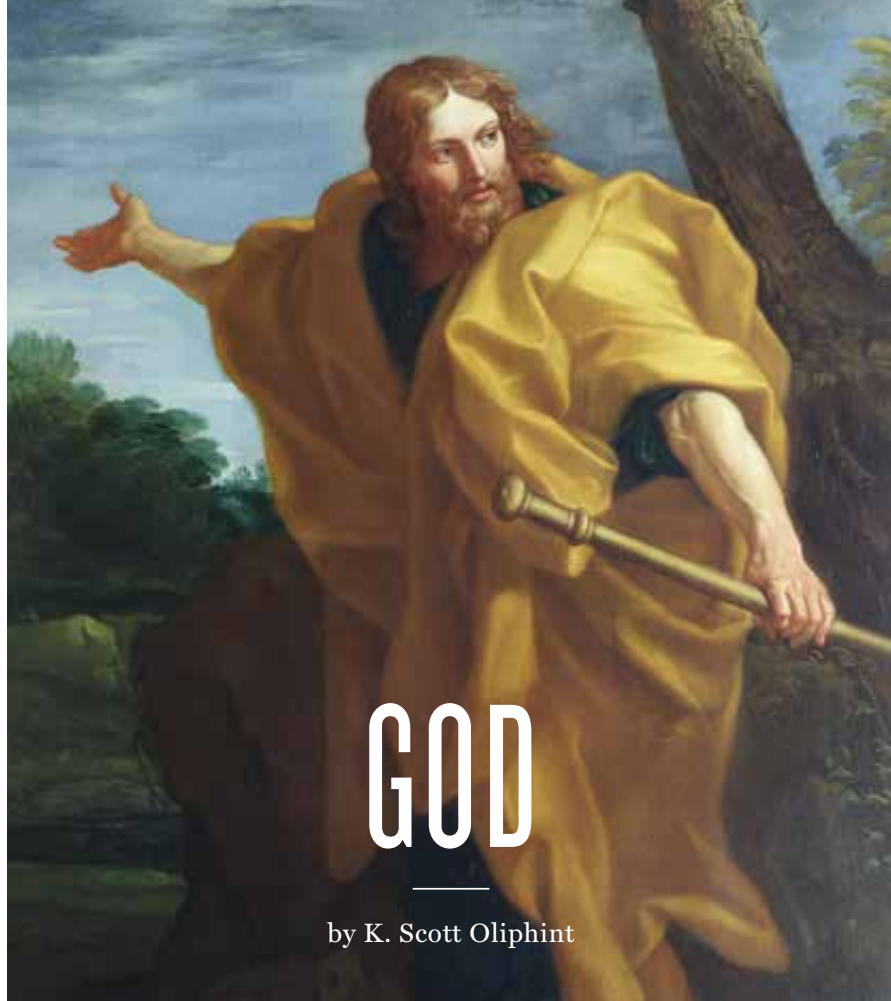
OUR
THANK YOU
FOR A GIFT
OF ANY
AMOUNT

When you support Ligonier's worldwide outreach this month, you will receive a copy of *Defending Your Faith* by Dr. R.C. Sproul. This helpful teaching series, subtitled *An Overview of Classical Apologetics*, covers the history of this vital discipline, while outlining ways reason and science are allies in defending the existence of God and the historical truth claims regarding Jesus Christ. This series is yours as our thanks for your gift of any amount. This offer expires January 31, 2016. Donate now using the included envelope or by calling 800-435-4343.



LIGONIER MINISTRIES
Renew your Mind.





GOD

by K. Scott Oliphint

SAINT JAMES THE GREATER, CARLO MARATTA, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

One of the most significant events in the life of the Lord's people in redemptive history is the exodus. However, as important as the exodus is, it is even more important for us to see that in Exodus 3, God reveals the majestic magnificence of His character. It is a magnificence that contains two glorious truths, inextricably linked, without which the Christian God cannot be understood or worshiped. As important as the salvation of Israel from Egypt is, it cannot properly be understood unless it

is framed within the revelation of God's twofold character as expressed by God's own declaration and as displayed in the burning bush.

As God comes to Moses, He announces Himself as "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3:6). Here God identifies Himself as the covenant God, the One who has sovereignly initiated a relationship with His people. The first thing that God wants Moses to recognize is that He is a God who is with His people

(v. 12), who will deliver them from Egypt (v. 8), and who has redeemed them for the purpose of worshiping Him alone (v. 12). God is accomplishing His covenant promise to Israel through Moses.

Moses recognizes the sheer weight of this call from God. So he hesitates. He looks for a way out. He first points to his own insufficiency ("Who am I?"; v. 11), and God points Moses back to His all-sufficiency ("But I will be with you"; v. 12).

But then Moses asks something that might, at first glance, seem strange. He wants to know God's name. The reason he asks for God's name is because, as we see in the Old Testament, the name of someone often designates the character of the person. Moses is asking God for a revelation of His character so that Israel may know that the One who has called Moses is sufficient. He is able to achieve the deliverance promised.

The name that God gives to Moses—"I AM WHO I AM"—is a revelation of God's utter and complete self-sufficiency. It is a revelation of God's *aseity*. He alone is of Himself (*a se*). God, and only God, is dependent on nothing. And this means, for Moses and for Israel, that God is not dependent on Pharaoh's cooperation to accomplish what He has promised.

This name of God—"I Am"—is the root form of the name *Yahweh*. John Calvin rightly says that this name is given to us in the Old Testament "that our minds may be filled with admiration as often as his incomprehensible essence is mentioned." That "incomprehensible essence," given in the name *Yahweh*, is mentioned more than five thousand times in the Old Testament.

In Exodus 3, therefore, God identifies Himself in two ways. He tells Moses that He is the covenant God, who is with His people, and that He is the self-existing God, who needs nothing in order to be who He is and to do what He purposes to do.

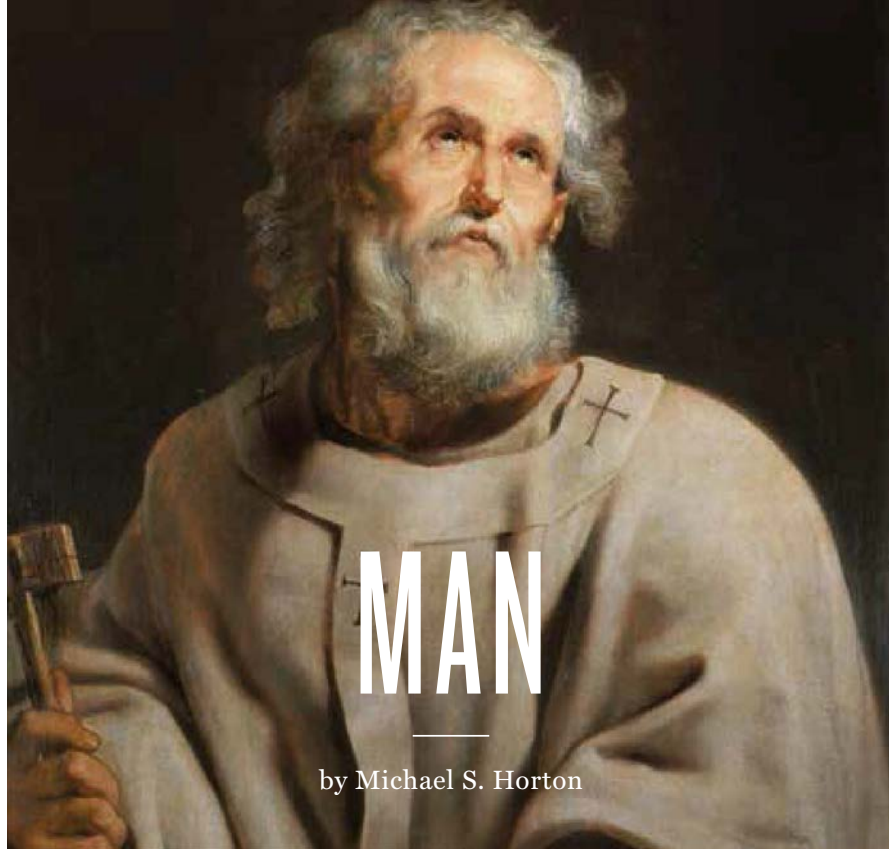
This brings us to the burning bush. The purpose of that miracle was not simply that Moses might be amazed; it was to *display God's own twofold character* that

He had announced to Moses. The burning bush illustrates what theologians call God's *transcendence* and *immanence*. The revelation of the burning bush was a revelation that the "I Am" is and always will be utterly independent and self-sufficient. He is fully and completely God even as He promises and plans to "come

down" (Ex. 3:8) to be with His people and to redeem them. The burning bush points us to that climactic revelation of the One who is fully and completely the self-existing God, who comes down to redeem a people, and who is Immanuel (God *with* us). It points us to Jesus Christ Himself (Matt. 1:23; 28:20).

The revelation of God's twofold character in Exodus 3 is essential to grasp for all who seek to engage in the biblical task of apologetics. No other religion on the face of the earth recognizes this kind of God. The faith we defend is wholly unique. It begins and ends with the revelation of this majestic mystery of God's character given to us in Holy Scripture. **TL**

DR. K. SCOTT OLIPHINT is professor of apologetics and systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and author of *Things That Cannot Be Shaken*.



by Michael S. Horton

SAINT PETER, PETER PAUL RUBENS, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Secular humanism has no way of explaining either the greatness or the tragedy of human existence. However, the biblical story of creation and the fall provides the basis for affirming both human dignity and depravity. We are born into the world “in Adam,” that is, as glorious traitors.

GLORIOUS IN EVERY WAY

God created us for His glory. We exist for Him, not He for us. And yet, unlike the rest of creation, we were created in God’s image for a special relationship with Him, naturally “endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image; having the law of God written in [our] hearts, and power to fulfill it” (Westminster Confession

of Faith 4.2). According to Scripture, human beings are neither semi-divine nor demonic, but creatures who have been given a royal dignity as God’s viceroys.

Adam and Eve were both created in God’s image, but God made Adam the federal head of the human race. Would Adam acknowledge gratefully his dependence on God and His revelation? Or would he seek to usurp God’s throne, determining for himself what he would believe and how he would live?

Notice the high view of human nature that the above quotation from the Westminster Confession reflects. We were created with the power to fulfill God’s law “yet under a possibility of transgressing,” the confession adds, “being left to

the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Along with this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.”

Adam and Eve were not neutral; they were oriented toward God and His righteous law. Besides this freedom of choice, Adam and Eve enjoyed a natural knowledge of God. By nature they loved God with their whole mind, soul, heart, and strength. God did not create man with any defect or weakness. The glory of God was reflected in the whole person: the body and its passions as well as the soul and the intellect.

EVER SINCE THE FALL, WE HAVE BEEN TWISTING, DISTORTING, AND SUPPRESSING THE TRUTH THAT COMES TO US THROUGH GENERAL AND SPECIAL REVELATION.

FALLEN IN EVERY WAY

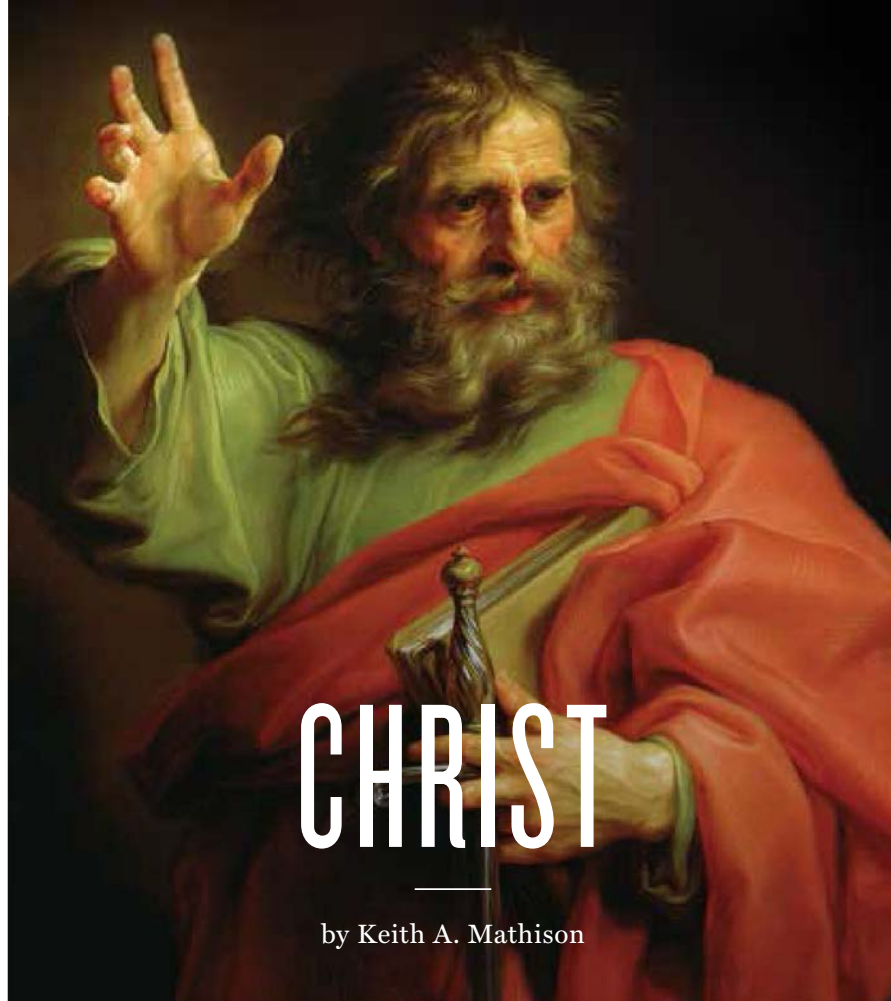
In Romans 1, Paul argues that the “wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (v. 18). You can’t separate reason from ethics. Ever since the fall, we have been twisting, distorting, and suppressing the truth that comes to us through general and special revelation. Unbelief is not the result of a lack of evidence. Everyone knows God’s existence and invisible attributes through His works in creation, “so they are without excuse” (vv. 19–20). It is not that God fails to reveal Himself, but that humanity does “not honor him as God or give thanks to him” (v. 21). To be grateful is to acknowledge dependence, but that is precisely what our fallen hearts do not

want to do. We do not want to reflect God’s glory; we want to possess the glory that is God’s alone. We do not want to be an image, but the original. We suppress the truth so that we can become our own creators and lords, as Paul indicates in his description of the lengths humanity will go to in order to deny accountability to God (vv. 22–32).

Total depravity does not mean that we are as bad as we can possibly be. After all, even Gentiles sometimes follow the dictates of their conscience (Rom. 2:14–16). Rather, it means that just as God’s image encompasses our whole self, the bondage of sin does as well. All aspects of our human constituent nature have been affected by the fall. We cannot reason, will, or work our way out of

our moral bondage (3:9–20). But at least our wills are free, right? Paul replies, “There is no one righteous, no, not one.” What about our minds? No, Paul writes, “no one understands.” Our hearts? Paul adds, “no one seeks for God” (Rom. 3:10–11). While we know by nature enough to condemn us, we can only be saved by the special revelation that God gives us in the gospel (3:21–31). The story of creation and the fall presents an apologetic basis for explaining both the dignity and depravity of man, and thus why all people are in need of Christ, who is the true image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). **T**

DR. MICHAEL S. HORTON is J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California, editor-in-chief of *Modern Reformation* magazine, and author of *Ordinary*.



CHRIST

by Keith A. Mathison

SAINT PAUL, POMPEO GIROLAMO BATONI, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

In his ministry, the Apostle Paul boldly proclaimed Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and as followers of Christ, we are called to do the same. Yet we do so knowing that the message of the gospel is foolishness to the world. As such, it has always been the object of derision by unbelievers. We see an example of this in a piece of ancient graffiti that was unearthed in Rome in 1857. The image depicts a human figure with the head of a donkey nailed to a cross. Next to the figure on the cross is a young man. An

inscription in Greek reads, “Alexamenos worships his god.” Those who believe the image is intended to portray Christ on the cross understand it to be an intentional mockery of Christian worship of Jesus Christ.

In our own day, the derision and mockery of Christ and Christians continues. A number of anti-Christian comedy acts, online videos, and memes declare, for example, that if Jesus was raised from the dead, then Christians worship a Jewish zombie. Should Christians be surprised at such

blasphemous and, frankly, asinine attacks? How do we defend the person and work of Christ against such slanders?

In order to proclaim and defend the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, several principles found in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians must be understood. The Corinthian Christians had been behaving according to the standards of worldly wisdom (vv. 10–17). In order to deal with this problem, Paul introduces a lengthy section in which he first criticizes the so-called wisdom of the world (1:18–2:5) and then offers true godly wisdom (2:6–3:4).

In 1 Corinthians 1:18–31, within the section criticizing the wisdom of the world, Paul looks first at those who reject the gospel (vv. 18–25) and then at those who accept it (vv. 26–31). In doing so, he is able to expound on the stark differences between true and false wisdom. Three times in verses 18–25, Paul speaks of the gospel message as “folly” to unbelievers (vv. 18, 21, 23). He concludes this section by asserting that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men” (v. 25). According to what the world considers wisdom, the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified is utter folly. It is foolishness. We should not be terribly surprised, therefore, when unbelievers treat our Lord and His gospel with contempt.

How do we answer such contempt? Well, we do not do it by altering the message of the gospel in order to make it something that unbelievers will consider wise. In other words, we don’t adapt the message to the standards of worldly wisdom. Other passages of Scripture

point out the necessity and importance of providing evidence (1 John 1:1–4, for example), but here Paul cautions us with regard to our expectations. We are proclaiming something that unbelievers see as foolishness, and only the Spirit of God can open their eyes. We continue to proclaim the truth, however. We continue to preach Christ and Him crucified. While this message is folly to those

who are perishing, it is “the power of God” to those being saved (1 Cor. 1:18, 24).

Does Paul’s caution mean that we cannot provide objective evidence showing that the “wisdom” of the world is the real foolishness? No. The fact that unbelievers suppress the truth doesn’t mean we

stop declaring it. There is abundant evidence that Jesus has risen from the dead. The tomb is empty because He is risen. Multitudes saw Him alive because He is risen. Furthermore, it can be historically shown that the biblical doctrine of resurrection does not mean what some people (ancient and contemporary) think it means, namely, the mere reanimation of a corpse.

If Jesus is risen from the dead, then the things He did and said that are explicit or implicit claims to deity must be taken seriously. If He is who He claimed to be—the eternal Son of God—and if He offers complete forgiveness of sin to all who place their faith in Him, then the absolute pinnacle of true foolishness is to reject Him. **T**

**IF HE IS WHO
HE CLAIMED
TO BE, THEN
THE ABSOLUTE
PINNACLE OF TRUE
FOOLISHNESS IS
TO REJECT HIM.**

DR. KEITH A. MATHISON is professor of systematic theology at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla., and author of *From Age to Age*.



Reason to Believe

R.C. SPOUL



This classic work by Dr. R.C. Sproul considers ten of the most common objections to the Christian faith and gives sound answers to them.

REA01BP | PRBK, 160 PAGES | (RETAIL \$13) **\$10.40**

Christian Evidences

R.C. SPOUL



Christian Evidences equips believers to deal with questions related to the existence of God, absolute truth, the problem of evil, and the uniqueness of Christ.

CHR31CC | 4 CDS | (RETAIL \$31) **\$27.90**

Battle for Our Minds

R.C. SPOUL



In three lectures, Dr. R.C. Sproul provides an accessible overview of the history of Western thought that explains how Western culture has moved from an emphasis on absolute truth to the postmodern rejection of fixed standards of universal truth. It is a helpful series for understanding where we are today and how Christians may respond to those around us.

BAT01CC | 2 CDS | (RETAIL \$17) **\$15.30**

BAT01U | STUDY GUIDE | **\$4**

Ultimate Issues

R.C. SPOUL



No matter their background, all human beings ask similar questions about the meaning of our existence. This series and book by Dr. R.C. Sproul

examine issues including the purpose of life, the origin of the universe, and the standards by which we evaluate right and wrong. It is designed particularly for young people as a tool to help them find God's answers to these ultimate questions.

ULT01BP | PRBK, 82 PAGES | (RETAIL \$10) **\$8**

ULT01DC | 2 DVDS | (RETAIL \$20) **\$18**

ULT01CC | 2 CDS | (RETAIL \$17) **\$15.30**

Choosing My Religion

R.C. SPOUL



Everyone has a set of beliefs that collectively make up what we may call their religion. However, few individuals take the

time to think through these beliefs and whether they can be supported and are worth holding to. *Choosing My Religion* assists young people in examining their fundamental beliefs and in explaining why Christianity is the only religion that can stand up under close scrutiny.

CHO01BP | PRBK, 128 PAGES | (RETAIL \$10) **\$8**

CHO01DC | 2 DVDS | (RETAIL \$25) **\$22.50**

CHO01CC | 3 CDS | (RETAIL \$24) **\$21.60**

CHO01US | STUDY GUIDE | (RETAIL \$15) **\$12**

Can I Trust the Bible?

R.C. SPOUL



The Bible lays the foundation of the Christian faith, and so it is the subject of many attacks from our unbelieving world. This helpful booklet

from Dr. R.C. Sproul answers many of these attacks and explains what we mean when we say that the Bible teaches no error.

CAN06BP | PRBK, 65 PAGES | (RETAIL \$2.50) **\$2**

Everyone's a Theologian

R.C. SPOUL



Theology is not a discipline reserved only for professionals. All of us have a theology; the key is to make sure it is a good

one. This introduction to systematic theology considers the core teachings of Scripture in order to help us all become better theologians.

EVE02BH | HDCVR, 357 PAGES | (RETAIL \$19) **\$15.20**

Objections Answered

R.C. SPOUL

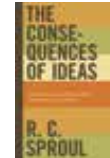


This series is a helpful resource for giving believers a basic grounding in apologetics and helping them learn to answer common objections to the Christian faith.

OBJ02CC | 3 CDS | (RETAIL \$24) **\$21.60**

The Consequences of Ideas

R.C. SPOUL



The ideas of the great philosophers do not remain in the ivory towers of scholarship but make their way into the worldviews of the common man. This series examines the great ideas that have shaped our thinking and offers a biblical critique.

CON01BP | PRBK, 224 PAGES | (RETAIL \$17) **\$13.60**

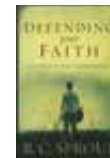
CON01DC | 9 DVDS | (RETAIL \$105) **\$94.50**

CON01CC | 20 CDS | (RETAIL \$74) **\$66.60**

CON01U | STUDY GUIDE | (RETAIL \$15) **\$12**

Defending Your Faith

R.C. SPOUL



Dr. R.C. Sproul's introduction to apologetics, the science of defending the faith, has helped many people give an answer for their hope.

DEF04BP | PRBK, 208 PAGES | (RETAIL \$17) **\$13.60**

DEF04BA | AUDIOBOOK | (RETAIL \$25) **\$20**

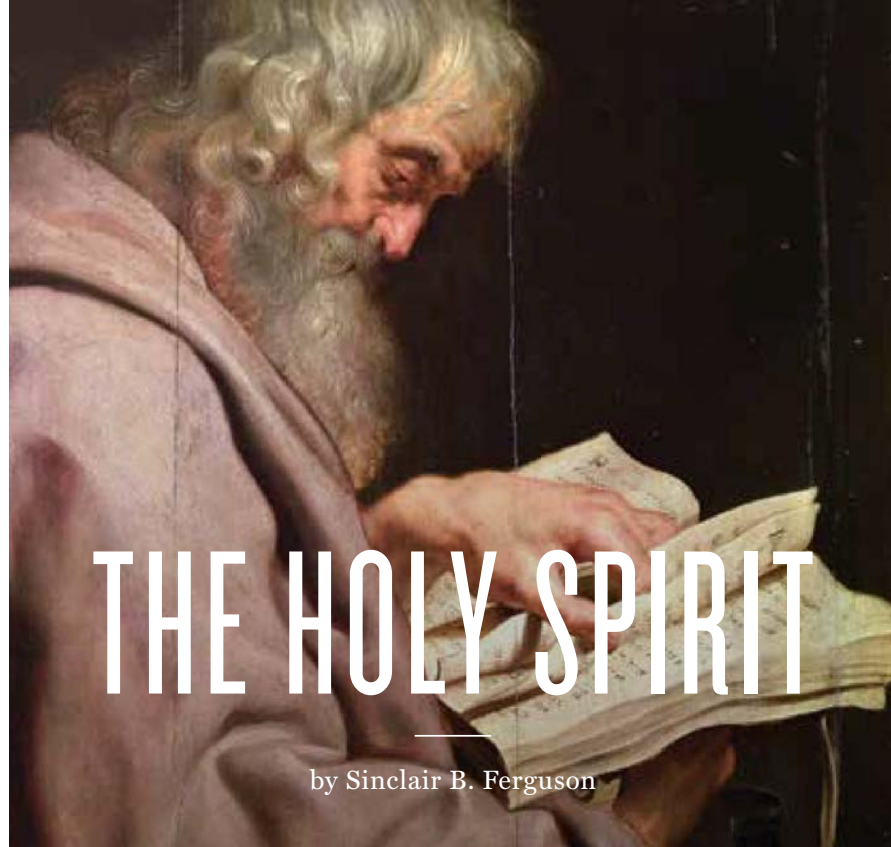
Apologetics of the Early Church

R.C. SPOUL



As Dr. R.C. Sproul demonstrates, the ways in which the earliest Christians defended the faith serve as a model for dealing with unbelieving objections today.

APO05CC | 5 CDS | (RETAIL \$38) **\$34.20**



THE HOLY SPIRIT

by Sinclair B. Ferguson

SAINT SIMON (SIMON THE ZEALOT), PETER PAUL RUBENS, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Many people come to faith in Jesus Christ long before they are able to articulate the theology of regeneration and conversion. Slowly, we realize that what seemed a “simple” act—trusting in Christ—was in fact a complex experience of divine activity. The Holy Spirit needed to be secretly active, since “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3).

Woven into this work of grace, then, is the unnoticed activity of the Spirit as He persuades us that the Scriptures—our ultimate source for knowing Christ—are the Word of the God. Coming to this conviction also seems simple and straightforward. But when examined closely, it reveals a similar complex of marvelous divine activity.

In the case of faith in Christ, the pattern is:

- (1) the incarnation of the Son;
- (2) His revelation of His identity;
- (3) His multifaceted corroboration in words and works;
- (4) illumination in the hearts of believers.

All this results in our seeing who Jesus really is and trusting Him.

Thus, the Spirit persuades us about Jesus entirely on the basis of Jesus Himself. Yet this persuasion arises because the Father has sent Him, because Jesus gives evidence of who He is, and because the Spirit opens our blind eyes to recognize Him. As with Peter, our conviction is not a flesh-and-blood matter (Matt. 16:16–17); like Mary in the

garden, we may not at first recognize who Jesus really is (John 20:14); like the disciples on the Emmaus Road, our eyes need to be opened (Luke 24:31).

However, our only access now to the knowledge of the Living Word (Jesus) is through the written Word. Faith in Christ depends upon Scripture’s divine character and testimony. We come to Christ through the Apostles’ words (John 17:20).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the process by which we are convinced that Scripture is God’s Word has an underlying structure similar to faith’s conviction about Christ:

FAITH IN CHRIST DEPENDS UPON SCRIPTURE’S DIVINE CHARACTER AND TESTIMONY. WE COME TO CHRIST THROUGH THE APOSTLES’ WORDS.

- (1) The inspiration of Scripture—it is God-breathed.
- (2) The revelation of Scripture’s identity in its internal claims to be the Word of God.
- (3) The corroboration of Scripture’s authority in the evidences that it is God’s Word through its message about God’s character, His saving works, fulfilled prophecy, and its effects in the lives of God’s people.
- (4) The illumination of Scripture’s message through the Spirit’s softening of hard hearts, bowing stubborn wills, and opening blind eyes as we read and hear its message.

Question: Why, then, do conversion to Christ and conviction about Scripture as God’s Word seem to us so simple: “I believe in Jesus Christ” and “I believe Scripture is the Word of God”?

Answer: Because in both instances, the object we trust is the final reason for our trust.

Thus, the Spirit does not add new information about Jesus. He simply opens

our eyes to see who He really is: “You are the Christ.”

Nor does the Spirit whisper directly and personally to us, “The Bible is the Word of God.” No, His testimony comes through the Scriptures themselves. He enables us to see Scripture as it really is when we read or hear it. He causes our hearts to burn when we experience that, in Scripture, God “addresses you” (present tense; Heb. 12:5).

Thus, the Spirit convinces us about Scripture ultimately from Scripture itself.

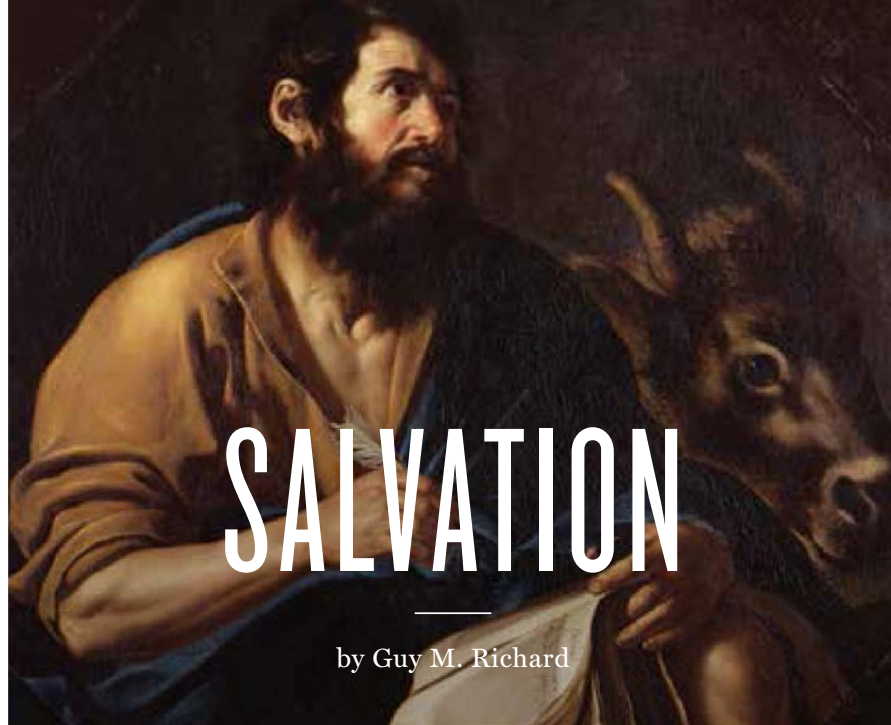
This was Timothy’s experience. God “breathed out” the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16). They claimed to be the Word of God (v. 15). Timothy was confronted with the evidence (including the changed lives of his mother, grandmother,

and spiritual father; vv. 10, 14). Timothy was convinced (v. 14).

This was the Thessalonians’ experience. Paul carried the Word to Thessalonica; it was spoken as the Word of God; it gave evidence of its identity; the Thessalonians “accepted it, not as the word of men, but as it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13). This persuasion was the Spirit’s work (1:5). This is the doctrine of the internal testimony of the Spirit expressed in its simplest form.

This is our experience, too. The same testimony of the Spirit is experienced whenever anyone comes to faith in Christ and trusts Scripture as God’s Word. Someone will experience it today. Pause, and thank God for it. ■

DR. SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON is dean of the Doctor of Ministry program at the Ligonier Academy of Biblical and Theological Studies and a Ligonier teaching fellow. He is author of numerous books, including *In Christ Alone*.



by Guy M. Richard

SAINT LUKE, JOHANN ULRICH LOTH, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Because faith ordinarily comes by hearing the good news (Rom. 10:17), you and I need to be always ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us, “What must I do to be saved?” But we also need to be ready to share that answer with others even when they do not directly ask for it. That answer must lie at the heart of the message that we communicate to others, because it is the means that God generally uses to bring them to faith in Christ.

There is perhaps no clearer answer to the question, “What must we do to be saved?” than the one the Apostle Paul provides in Romans 10:8–13:

But what does [the righteousness based on faith] say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that

Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Here, Paul says that our salvation is not actually about our doing anything—as it is under the law (v. 5); rather, our salvation is about our believing. And what a glorious “word” that is. God has brought the way of salvation “near” to us (v. 8). He has made it easy, if you will, not something that only the strongest or the fittest or the most intelligent among us could achieve. There is no initiation to endure; no IQ test to pass; no hoops

to jump through; no test of physical fitness to conquer. It does not depend on who we know or where we were born or how much money we have. God has brought the way of salvation near to everyone not by tying it to something we must do but by making it available to those who simply believe.

But what does it mean to believe? According to Romans 10:9–10, it means, first, that we must know and affirm certain important truths, namely, that “Jesus is Lord” and that “God raised him from the dead.” In other words, there must be a basic content to our faith. We must believe that Jesus is none other than the Lord of glory and that He died and rose again. The resurrection is central to our defense of the faith. It is a declaration to the world that He really is the Son of God in power (Rom. 1:4) and a confirmation that His sacrifice for our sins really has been accepted by God for our justification (Rom. 4:25).

But for Paul, believing is more than simply acknowledging a few important truths. It necessarily involves the heart. Even the demons believe the facts about God (James 2:19). But they hate those facts, just as they hate God Himself. They do not believe in their hearts but only with their minds. Paul says that faith believes both with the mind and with the heart. It trusts and puts its hope in the things it knows about God, just as it trusts and puts its hope in God Himself.

Romans 10:9–10 goes even further by adding a third component to believing: we must also “confess with [our] mouths.” The reason for this is that believing and con-

fessing must go together. We must confess “Jesus is Lord” with our mouths precisely because we must believe Him and His promises with our hearts (see Matt. 12:33–34). True faith always reflects itself in our speech and actions, albeit imperfectly. If our faith never manifests itself in our speech and life, then it is not a real faith. It is not a believing in the heart.

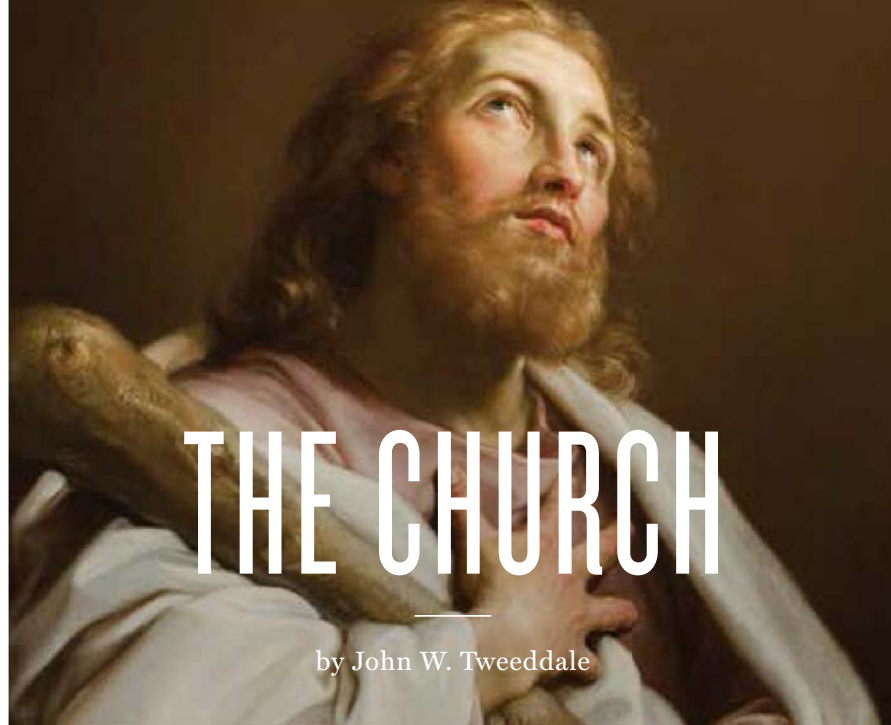
This means that genuine faith will gladly submit to the lordship of Jesus. It will trust Him and entrust itself to His Word. It also means that faith will necessarily be repentant. It will not persist in an attitude of defiance and rebellion against the Lord but will acknowledge Him to be Lord in every area of life. And it will bear the fruit of love for Christ and His people.

The most glorious thing by far in this passage, however, is the promise that Paul holds

out to us. He promises that, if we believe in Jesus in the above-mentioned way, we “will be saved.” Regardless of who we are or what we have done—remember, Paul himself was a murderer, a blasphemer, and a persecutor of Christians (Acts 7:58–8:3; 1 Tim. 1:13)—we will be saved from the guilt and condemnation that our sins have brought upon us (we “will not be put to shame”). We will be saved unto the glorious “riches” of God freely bestowed upon “all who call on” Jesus as their Lord and Savior. He—and He alone—is the “Lord of all.” There is no other name under heaven by which anyone can be saved. **T**

**GOD HAS BROUGHT
THE WAY OF
SALVATION NEAR
TO EVERYONE
NOT BY TYING IT
TO SOMETHING
WE MUST DO
BUT BY MAKING
IT AVAILABLE
TO THOSE WHO
SIMPLY BELIEVE.**

DR. GUY M. RICHARD is senior minister of First Presbyterian Church in Gulfport, Miss., and author of *What Is Faith?*



THE CHURCH

by John W. Tweeddale

SAINT JAMES THE LESS, POMPEO GIROLAMA BATONI, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The first time the word *church* is mentioned in the New Testament, it comes from the lips of Jesus. To a ragtag band of Apostles, He declared, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). With these words, Jesus set a course to change the world. The twentieth-century scholar Alfred North Whitehead once suggested that the development of Western thought is a series of footnotes on Plato. While the prominence of the famous Greek philosopher is undeniable, Jesus’ assertion is even more far-reaching. The entire history of the world is an unpacking of Jesus’ claim to build His church in hostile territory.

Several observations about Jesus’ comments are worth considering. First, Jesus promised to build His church. At its most basic level, the church represents a gathering of blood-bought sinners who belong to Jesus.

Second, the building of the church is God’s plan, crystallized in the Great Commission, for the salvation of His people throughout history and around the world. Third, the church will exist amid unthinkable wickedness both inside and outside her boundaries. Yet no power of darkness—heresy or hellion, death or division, sin or Satan—will be able ultimately to overtake her. The final victory has already been secured for Christ’s church in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Given that Jesus is the owner, builder, and defender of the church, followers of Christ are left with a fundamental question: What should be the distinguishing mark of Christians when they gather together to worship the triune God, carry out the work of everyday ministry activities, and engage in the rigors of apologetics and evangelism? Stated succinctly, How shall we then live as Christ’s church?

One answer may be found in the Upper Room Discourse in the gospel of John. On the heels of Judas’ exit to betray Him, Jesus offers a parting exhortation to His frazzled disciples in order to prepare them for His crucifixion: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35). To overcome a world vandalized by betrayal and death, Jesus directs His followers to love each other.

At first blush, Jesus’ call to love may ring hollow. In our day, love is pervasive but impotent. Sadly, many think of love in terms of self-gratification rather than self-sacrifice. For them, love is only a feeling that must

be coddled and accommodated. As a result, love in our culture is a commodity to be used, not a commitment to be cultivated. For Christ, however, love is more than whimsical palpitations.

In one sense, there is nothing new about Jesus’ command. As early as Leviticus 19:18, God’s people were instructed to love their neighbors. What is new is not the principle but the paradigm. We are to love each other, Jesus says, “*just as I have loved you.*” The sacrificial love of Christ displayed on the cross is the standard by which we are to love one another. This does not mean that we must literally be crucified to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. But it does mean that we must consider their interests above our own (Phil. 2:3–8). To the extent that Christ-centered love defines our churches, the watching world will measure the credibility of our witness. Not only that, Jesus further states that the world will judge

the truthfulness of the gospel based upon our love for one another (John 17:20–23).

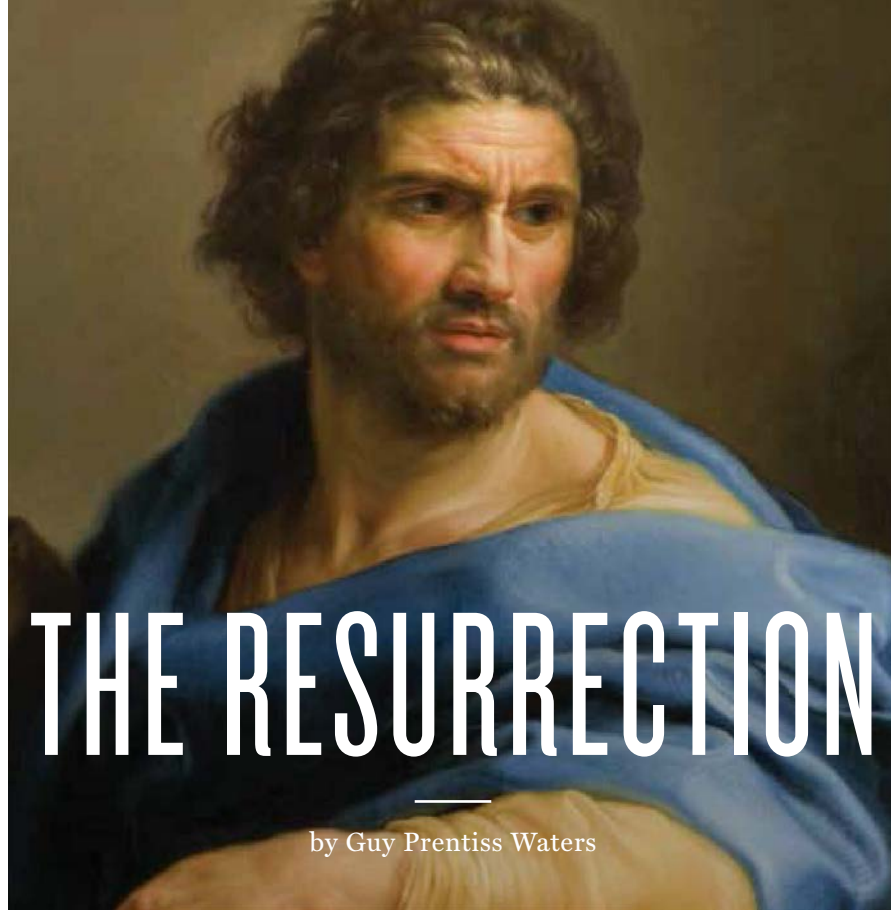
If Jesus’ new command encapsulates our marching orders, then the opposite of His words is also true. Our failure to love will have a direct impact on our congregations. If we do not show each other the love of Christ, the world will not know that we are His disciples, and, even more sobering, they will not know the love of God in the gospel.

As the late Francis Schaeffer rightly argued, observable, Christlike love is the final apologetic. If we speak in the tongues of men and apologists, but have not love, our churches will sound like noisy gongs and clanging cymbals (1 Cor. 13:1). Without the love of Christ, why should the world listen to the church’s witness?

Love is the great mark of the church. Our love for one another demonstrates that we are Christ’s disciples and displays to the world the love of God in Christ. While the Christian faith is objectively true regardless of how well we follow Christ’s command, we should remember that the world often measures the truth claims of Christianity against the lives of professing Christians. When we fail to love (and we will), we must also remember that Christ does not build His church because of us but despite us and even through us. The great testimony of the church is that “God showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). If that is true (and it is), perhaps a better question for us to ask is, How shall we then love? 

**TO OVERCOME
A WORLD
VANDALIZED BY
BETRAYAL AND
DEATH, JESUS
DIRECTS HIS
FOLLOWERS TO
LOVE EACH OTHER.**

REV. JOHN W. TWEEDDALE is senior associate editor of *Tabletalk* and an adjunct instructor at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla.



THE RESURRECTION

by Guy Prentiss Waters

SAINT THOMAS, POMPEO GIROLAMA BATONI, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The resurrection of the dead is anathema to the modern mind. Rudolf Bultmann, one of the most famous New Testament scholars of the twentieth century and a theological liberal, declared, “An historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable.” To the Apostle Paul, however, Christianity without the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was inconceivable (see 1 Cor. 15:1–11). In company with the other Apostles, Paul proclaimed the resurrection as the great fact upon which Christianity stands or falls.

How do we tell jaded and skeptical people about the resurrection? Luke’s account of

Paul’s ministry in Athens (Acts 17:16–34) gives us much-needed direction. When Paul arrived in Athens, he preached at the synagogue, but he also went to the “market-place,” where philosophers and teachers congregated to exchange ideas (v. 17). Paul persevered through initial misunderstanding and mockery, and he accepted an invitation to address the Areopagus, an august body of retired public officials.

In that address, Paul first gently but firmly exposes one of the fundamental and fatal weaknesses of polytheism. The altar “to the unknown god” was the Athenians’ standing acknowledgment that their religion was insufficient and inadequate. Paul then

presents to the Athenians the solution that they need but never found on their own—the worship of the one true God.

Paul tells the Athenians about the sovereign and all-sufficient God who made and upholds the world and all that is in it (vv. 24–25). He also tells them about themselves (vv. 26–29). God has made all human beings from “one man,” and He has furthermore “determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (17:26). The entirety of our lives is lived inescapably before the omnipresent God (17:28). We are, furthermore, His image-bearers (“offspring”; vv. 28–29).

For these reasons, we should “seek God” in the hopes of “find[ing] him” (v. 27). We should not try to think of God or worship Him with images (v. 29). As sinners, however, the best we manage is to “feel [our] way,” that is, to grope in the dark (v. 27). God is always present to His creation, but His sinful creatures willfully refuse to come to Him. Even so, because God has created and sustains us, we will one day have to give an account before Him (see v. 31).

Thus far, Paul has reasoned with the Athenians based upon what they know of God and of themselves from the creation. He then turns to a particular fact of history—God raised a man from the dead (v. 31). That God has lifted the sentence of death from Jesus and publicly vindicated Him means that Jesus was a righteous man. That is to say, He is unlike any other person who walked the face of the earth. This righteous Jesus had claimed on earth that He would judge all people (see John 5:19–29). The resurrection vindicated this claim. In raising Jesus from the dead, God publicly affirmed Jesus’ claim

to judge the world at the end of the age.

Because this judgment is certain and imminent, Paul pleads with his hearers to “repent” (Acts 17:30), to turn from the service of idols to the worship of the triune God. The resurrection and the worldwide preaching of the gospel has brought to an end the “times of ignorance,” during which God was pleased to withhold final judgment (v. 30). The days of comparative but culpable

Gentile blindness have come to an end. Only the gospel can dispel the ongoing ignorance and blindness in which unrenewed humanity finds itself.

Paul’s mention of the resurrection yields two very different results. Some mock and sneer—the very idea that one’s body would

have immortal existence was laughable to the Greek mind (v. 32a). Others, however, want to hear more and, trusting in Christ, follow Paul (vv. 32b–34).

Proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus did not, on this occasion, win Paul the accolades of the Athenian intelligentsia. Neither did it yield a visibly impressive host of converts in Athens. But Paul did not preach the resurrection because it was popular. He preached it because it was true. The resurrection of Jesus confirmed the coming judgment but also secured blessing for the undeserving. However God is pleased to use this truth in the lives of unbelievers, the church’s task remains the same—to tell others that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. **T**

DR. GUY PRENTISS WATERS is James M. Baird Jr. Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Miss., a teaching elder in the PCA, and author of *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul*.



Grief and the Christian

ELIZABETH W.D. GROVES

WE WORSHIP A BIG GOD. He is sovereign and powerful. We are in His hands, and nothing happens to us by chance. That's good news. But in grief, if that is all we remember about God, it might actually make the pain worse, rather than better. It might leave us thinking, like Mary and Martha (John 11:21, 32), "Lord, you could have stopped this, and you purposely didn't. Why?" God's sovereignty might leave us more angry than comforted.

So we need to remember some other things, too.

JESUS DEFEATED DEATH

God hates death even more than we do. That's part of the reason Jesus came. The wonderful news for us is that when Jesus broke death's power by dying and rising from the dead, He did it not only for Himself but also for all who are united to Him (Heb. 2:14–15).

That means that those who die in Christ are more alive than ever and are experiencing life, joy, and glory beyond anything we can imagine, right now, in God's very presence. It may seem that the Lord did not "heal" or "protect" them, but in fact He has healed and protected

them in a much fuller, deeper, more permanent way.

When our oldest child went away to college, I expected to spend weeks feeling weepy from missing him. But he was so happy there, and I was so happy for him, that I found I wasn't nearly as sad as I had expected. Similarly, when we know that our loved one is free, alive, and worshiping the Lord face-to-face with joy and abandon, it helps lessen our sadness.

WE GRIEVE WITH HOPE

First Thessalonians 4:13 says, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope." Notice that the text does not say that we shouldn't grieve, just that we should grieve differently than those who have no hope.

Even in the context of hope, we still grieve, and that is appropriate. Jesus Himself wept at His friend's tomb. The Bible does not dismiss or minimize grief, and we shouldn't underestimate its impact. But we grieve differently than those without hope.

Let's say I don't know Jesus, and I be-

lieve there is no further existence after death. Then if my husband dies, he really is lost to me. Every single thing that made him who he was—his quirky sense of humor, his passion for people (and basketball and popcorn), his warm smile, his open heart, all of it—is gone forever. That grief is a black hole.

But for those who die in Christ—and for those who grieve in Christ—the picture is very different. The sorrow of missing loved ones is still incredibly painful, but the separation is only temporary. We will see them again. That is an entirely different picture.

GOD IS WITH US

In the midst of grief, it is critical for us to remember that the God who is sovereign and mighty is also Immanuel—God *with* us. When our grief is debilitating and it feels impossible to function, God does not sit aloof in heaven. He does not leave us to figure out how to handle grief on our own or how to cast about for resources to get through it. He walks every step of the journey with us.

Jesus came and lived as a human in this broken world. He gets it. He knows the tormenting thirst and weakness of life's final hours. As our High Priest who fully understands our heartaches, He intercedes for us (Heb. 7:25), as does His Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26). He calls us friends (John 15:15) and promises that He will never leave nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5), that His Spirit will dwell in us (John 14,

and that He will give us peace (14:27; 16:33) and even joy (15:11; 16:22).

What we need most in the midst of grief is God Himself. He will meet us, give us Himself, fill the void left by our loved ones, warm our hearts, lift our burdens, and draw us into the sweet balm of fellowship with His Spirit. And as our Father tenderly swaddles us in His love, our love for Him will grow, our faith and

trust will deepen, and even amid the heartache of grief we will praise Him with deep and true joy.

This is something the Lord does by His Spirit, through His Word, prayer, and the fellowship and love of His people. Those means of grace are not "tasks" for our to-do list—more burdens placed on our grief-weary shoulders. They are His love for us. If in your grief you struggle to pray or read the Bible, ask someone

to pray for you and read the Bible to you.

Grief is really, really hard. It hurts like crazy. But the Lord has broken death's power, and therefore His children who have died are with Him. And He is with us. And before you know it, we will be together with Him and with them. That removes death's sting—it really does. Even in the rending ache of grief, with the Holy Spirit's help, we can hang on to Jesus and grieve with the hope that His death and resurrection bought for us. **TE**

ELIZABETH W.D. GROVES is lecturer in Biblical Hebrew at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. She is author of *Grief Undone: A Journey with God and Cancer*.



We Cannot Be Silent

R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.

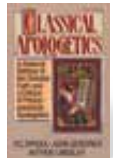


This work by Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr. points out that western cultures have undergone a moral revolution in less than a generation. It considers present challenges and provides Christians with perspective on our time, encouraging them toward faithfulness.

WEC01BH | HCVR, 256 PAGES | (RETAIL \$25) **\$20**

Classical Apologetics

VARIOUS



Drs. John H. Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley, and R.C. Sproul provide an overview of classical apologetics that helps believers demonstrate the existence of God and the reliability of Scripture and answer the critics of the Christian faith.

CLA02BP | PRBK, 364 PAGES | (RETAIL \$26) **\$20.80**

Handout Apologetics

JOHN H. GERSTNER



This important work by Dr. John H. Gerstner is a succinct presentation of the key issues in apologetics, and it provides a helpful presentation of how Christians may make a rational case for their faith.

HAN01DC | 2 DVDS | (RETAIL \$70) **\$63**
HAN01U | STUDY GUIDE | (RETAIL \$15) **\$12**

Tactics

GREGORY KOUKL

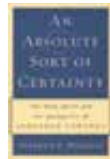


Gregory Koukl assists believers in keeping apologetic conversations on point so that they can respectfully get unbelievers to consider the claims of Christ.

TAC01BP | PRBK, 208 PAGES | (RETAIL \$16) **\$12.80**

An Absolute Sort of Certainty

STEPHEN J. NICHOLS



In this book, Dr. Stephen J. Nichols looks at Jonathan Edwards' understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in defending the Christian faith. Edwards reminds us that the Spirit alone can persuade people of the truth.

ABS01BP | PRBK, 232 PAGES | (RETAIL \$15) **\$12**

Things that Cannot Be Shaken

K. SCOTT OLIPHINT & ROD MAYS



Based on the hymn "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," this work helps Christians understand how they can be certain that Christianity is true and give an answer to those who question their beliefs.

THI05BP | PRBK, 160 PAGES | (RETAIL \$13) **\$10.40**



JANUARY 2016 DAILY BIBLE STUDIES

INTO *the* WORD

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

WITH ITS FAST-PACED narrative, the gospel of Mark can be read through quickly in one sitting. However, if readers move too rapidly, they will likely miss much of the nuance that the second evangelist brings to his account of the life of Christ. For in Mark's gospel, as in the other three gospels, the events of Jesus' life point to one undeniable conclusion—Jesus is the incarnate Son of God who has come to set His people free and conquer the darkness of sin.

This year, our *Tabletalk* daily studies will take us through the gospel of Mark verse by verse, seek-

ing to understand how Mark's portrait reveals our Savior in all His depth and beauty. We begin this month by studying Mark 1:1–2:12, considering in particular how Jesus has brought about a new exodus and how His healings testify to His divine authority.

One key theme in Mark's gospel is the need for faith, as we see in the account of the paralytic and his friends (2:1–12). To help us understand what Scripture as a whole teaches about faith, we will conclude our studies this month with devotionals based on Dr. R.C. Sproul's teaching series *Faith: The Evidence of Things Unseen*. **1**

"WE BELIEVE IN ONE UNBEGOTTEN GOD, FATHER ALMIGHTY. . . AND IN ONE ONLY-BEGOTTEN WORD, WISDOM, SON . . . THE TRUE IMAGE OF THE FATHER, EQUAL IN HONOR AND GLORY."

—*Athanasius of Alexandria, Statement of Faith*

ABIDING IN THE WORD

These verses parallel the themes of the studies each week. We encourage you to hide them in your heart so that you may not sin against the Lord:

Week of January 3	MARK 1:11
Week of January 10	1 TIMOTHY 3:16
Week of January 17	ISAIAH 46:13
Week of January 24	ROMANS 10:17
Week of January 31	MARK 2:17

THE SECOND EVANGELIST

WEEKEND DEVOTIONAL
JANUARY 2 - 3

LEAD US HOME

JOE HOLLAND

MARK 1:1 "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."



CORAM DEO

Living before the
face of God

Take some time today to skim Mark's gospel and the outline of Jesus' life that it tells. Pick one or two passages to consider more carefully and reflect on what they say about the Son of God and His mission. Pray that the Lord would bless your reading of this gospel over the coming year, and ask Him to use it to conform you to the image of Christ. Pray also that God would bless everyone who is studying Mark with us this year and that He would illumine the text for our edification.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Mark 3:11; 5:7;
12:1-12; 14:61-62

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 1-2
Matthew 1

THE WEEKEND

Genesis 3-7
Matthew 2

God's salvation and written revelation are inseparable. When the Lord intervenes to save His people, He also inspires Scriptures to guide them. As God redeemed ancient Israel from slavery, He moved Moses to author Genesis-Deuteronomy. During the periods of conquest, monarchy, and exile, our Creator inspired prophets to write the Historical, Poetic, and Prophetic Books of the Old Testament. So, when the Lord acted definitively and finally in Christ to save sinners, the New Testament was inevitable.

In canonical order, the gospel of Mark is the New Testament's second book. Yet when it comes to the four Gospels, it may have been the first one written. For various reasons, most biblical scholars today believe Mark was written first, followed by Matthew and Luke, who followed Mark's outline. Some scholars think that John also consulted Mark's gospel. Whatever the case, the writing process for these other gospels involved something more than simply adding information to Mark.

It should not trouble us if Mark was written first and others relied heavily on his work though. If Mark's gospel is divinely inspired, why would you not use it? The gospel of Mark is almost certainly a record of Peter's essential preaching about Jesus, as the early church fathers unanimously assert. The style of the book confirms this. We can imagine the tight stories with brief narrative connections we find in Mark's gospel as being texts originating from individual sermons.

Despite being Mark's main source, Peter did not write this book. Early church tradition identifies the author as John Mark, the son of a Christian woman in Jerusalem who had personal contact with Peter (Acts 12:6-25). This same John Mark was the subject of a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas that caused them to go their separate ways for a time (Acts 15:36-41). By the end of Paul's life, however, the Apostle and John Mark reconciled (2 Tim. 4:11). Some extrabiblical traditions say that Mark established the church in Egypt and started a catechetical school there to teach people the Christian faith.

All indications are that Mark wrote his gospel to proclaim to as many people as possible that Jesus is the Son of God, as his gospel begins and essentially ends with that truth (Mark 1:1; 15:39). His simple, vivid writing style and explanations of Jewish customs prove that he wanted a wide audience, including non-Jews, to be able to read his book.

I was lost and frustrated. The trail I was on is one of the most famous in the state of Virginia, named after what the mostly treeless mountain it is on looks like from afar—an old rag. I hike Old Rag often. But this time I was lost. Several paths looked like the way forward, and each failed to bring me to the trail I thought I knew so well. Finally, I slid down the side of one particular rock scramble only to find a group of hikers I had passed fifteen minutes before. I was back on the trail.

It's difficult to explain what it feels like to not know the way when you feel like you should. The various possible ways look familiar—like strangers in a crowd whom you mistake for friends until they turn and you pretend that your wave was intended for someone else. It is the haunting familiarity of lostness that creates a frustrating anxiety. It is how so many people hike through life. They are almost sure they know where they are going, almost finding trailheads, almost reuniting with friends-turned-strangers.

Jesus talked about this kind of path-seeking when He encouraged His followers in the Sermon on the Mount:

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matt. 7:13-14)

According to Jesus, there is a wide gate and a narrow gate, a life-and-death sce-

nario, and a warning that few find life. It's a sobering statement, blunt and serious. It's also difficult to imagine that Jesus and His listeners could consider this topic of spiritual trailblazing without thinking about David's psalm on the same topic written so many years before. David says as a declaration to God's goodness, "You make known to me the path of life" (Ps. 16:11).

These two statements about the way to life—one spoken by King David and the other by David's King—serve together to encourage disciples who often find themselves turned around on the path of life. One passage declares the way to life, the other the means. There are two paths and one trail guide. God alone is the One who does the revealing. He is the One who leads His disciples home to safety.

When hiking Old Rag, you look for baby-blue trail markers. Park rangers have gone before hikers and marked trees, rocks, and turns with blue marks every few feet. On that day when I got lost, I had stopped following the markers because I thought I knew the way. What frustrated me in my waywardness was that I couldn't find them again. But when I did, I knew I was back on the right path. There is One who the Great Trail Guide has sent ahead of us to mark our way. And He has marked the trail of life in marks of red.

REV. JOE HOLLAND is church-planting pastor of Christ Covenant Presbyterian Church in Culpeper, Va. He blogs regularly at The Christward Collective.

THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

MARK 1:2–3 “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Many believers neglect to study the Old Testament because they find it confusing or because they assume that it is less important to the Christian faith than the New Testament. As Mark’s gospel shows us, however, this is not the case. We cannot understand Jesus or His gospel without a proper grounding in the Old Testament Scriptures. Thus, it is important for us to read and study the whole counsel of God. Let us not neglect the study of either testament.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 40:1–5
Mark 14:49
1 Corinthians 10:1–6
2 Timothy 3:16–17

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 8–10
Matthew 3

Of all the Gospels, Mark spends the least amount of space establishing the context for Jesus’ ministry. Matthew and Luke provide lengthy accounts of the birth of Christ before recording the ministry of Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptist (Matt. 1–2; Luke 1–2). Prior to his description of the work of John the Baptist, John writes a lengthy prologue that stretches all the way back to eternity in its explicit affirmation of the Son of God’s eternal preexistence (John 1:1–18). Mark, however, gives only an Old Testament quote before talking about John the Baptist (Mark 1:2–3).

But this brief quotation speaks volumes about our Lord’s ministry. In beginning his gospel with a citation of the Hebrew Scriptures, Mark shows that we cannot understand the life of Jesus apart from the history of Israel. Jesus’ ministry fulfills God’s old covenant revelation. The new covenant community our Savior established is not wholly new; it is the continuation of the old covenant community.

Mark’s source for this quote is “Isaiah the prophet” (v. 2), yet the actual quote combines Exodus 23:20; Isaiah 40:3; and Malachi 3:1. Only Isaiah is mentioned specifically because ancient Jewish writers commonly cited only the author of the most well-known text when they combined various passages as Mark has done. It is possible that Mark is not the first to combine these texts; some scholars suggest he might have taken his quote from a preexisting source that collected important messianic passages from the Hebrew Bible.

In any case, the text has a multilayered theological significance as Mark applies it to the work of John, the one who went before “the Lord.” Isaiah 40:3 comes from the second half of the book of Isaiah, wherein the prophet describes a new exodus that follows the Babylonian exile. This exodus includes the final atonement for sin and is consummated in the new heavens and earth (Isa. 53; 65:17–25). In applying it to John, Mark reveals that God’s salvation from our bondage to transgression and His renewal of all things takes place through Christ, whom John announced. That Mark’s quote also refers to Exodus 23:20 and Moses, the leader of the first exodus, confirms that Jesus brings about a new exodus for His people. Also, we note that Isaiah 40:3 is about a voice that prepares the way for Yahweh, the one true God and covenant Lord of Israel. By applying this text to the voice that prepares the way for Jesus, Mark identifies Jesus as this one true God, implicitly teaching the deity of Christ. **■**

THE WILDERNESS PREACHER

MARK 1:4–6 “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (vv. 4–5).

King Manasseh of Judah, who reigned in the first half of the seventh century B.C., epitomized the depths of wickedness to which the old covenant people of God had sunk. Not only did he commit idolatry as many other kings had done, but he also “burned his son as an offering” (2 Kings 21:6) and “shed very much innocent blood” (v. 16). In these respects, he and many of the other kings and people of Israel and Judah were worse sinners than the wilderness generation who left Egypt. That generation also committed idolatry (Ex. 32), but it was not guilty of the grievous sins of murder and the other heinous acts of the monarchical period described in the Old Testament. Consequently, many old covenant prophets idealized the wilderness era, when God constituted Israel as a nation. They looked forward to a time when the Lord would reconstitute His people in the wilderness. He would give them a fresh start and save them as He had once redeemed them from Egypt (Isa. 40:3; Hos. 2:14–15).

In light of that prophetic hope, John the Baptist’s ministry in the wilderness (Mark 1:4) is particularly significant. His work marked the beginning of the true reformation of Israel, the new era of blessing the prophets anticipated. John’s ministry was also scandalous. Matthew 3:7–10 and Mark 11:27–33 indicate that the Pharisees and Sadducees never really supported John’s baptism. It went against one of their fundamental tenets: the idea that being a Jew according to the flesh—a physical descendant of Abraham—was essentially enough to have a place in God’s kingdom (Matt. 3:7–10; John 8:31–33). A baptism of repentance in the wilderness said otherwise. At the time, Jews prescribed water rituals similar to baptism for Gentiles who converted to Judaism. After all, Gentiles were unclean sinners and had to be cleansed in order to become full Jews. To require Jews to be baptized, as John did, was to proclaim that physical lineage does not make one a true member of God’s people; rather, true Israel is made up of repentant sinners who love the Lord with all that they are (Deut. 10:16; see Rom. 2:28–29).

Our Creator, as John taught by His baptism, does not save people based on physical descent; He redeems only those who repent and trust in His promises. In John’s day, the Jewish people needed a new start, a new beginning as a repentant people, because the kingdom of God was about to break in to history. They were sinners—just like the Gentiles—and they needed to return to the Lord. **■**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Jesus’ message to the Jews, and by extension to all people, is the same as John’s: Men and women can have a place in God’s kingdom only if they repent of their sins and turn to the Lord alone for salvation (Mark 1:14–15). We cannot rely on our church membership, our history of Christian service, or the faith of our parents in order to be saved. Instead, we will be redeemed only if we turn from our sin and place our faith in Christ alone for salvation.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Exodus 19
Jeremiah 2
Hosea 13:4–5
Luke 3:1–20

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 11–13
Matthew 4



SPRING PREVIEW WEEKEND

FEBRUARY 23-27, 2016

Visit Reformation Bible College during our Spring Preview Weekend and you'll have the opportunity to:

- Experience a typical day at RBC: tour the campus, sit in on classes, and share a meal with the RBC faculty.
- Meet fellow students while participating in student life social events.
- Attend the Ligonier National Conference at no charge.



Reformation Bible College

To join us, register today at
ReformationBibleCollege.org/preview.

THE FORERUNNER'S MESSAGE

MARK 1:7–8 "He preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'"



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

The contrast between John's water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit also points to the fact that water baptism is insufficient if it is merely an outward rite that is not accompanied by true faith. What really matters is Spirit baptism—not a second blessing of the Holy Spirit after a first baptism in water but the sovereign work of the Spirit in changing our hearts and granting us faith. That is the only kind of baptism that will save. Have you received it?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 32:14–20
Ezekiel 39:29
Acts 19:1–7
1 Corinthians 12:13

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 14–16
Matthew 5:1–26

Lest our familiarity with the four Gospels blind us to the significance of John the Baptist in his day, we should try to put ourselves in the shoes of those people who lived in John's era and experienced his ministry firsthand. First-century Jews lived at the end of a period of prophetic silence. Since Malachi's death in the fifth century B.C., there had been no direct word from God. Jews who understood their Scriptures knew this silence would not last forever, that Elijah was coming "before the great and awesome day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This promise generated a hope for a new prophet whom God would send just before the day of His salvation. So, a man in the wilderness dressed like Elijah was a sign that perhaps the Lord's silence was over, that He was finally acting to defeat the Jews' enemies and deal with the ungodliness that marked previous generations of the old covenant community (Mark 1:6; see 2 Kings 1:8).

John's message, as recorded in today's passage, confirmed the hopes and expectations of the faithful Jews who witnessed the first-century ministry of John. As Mark 1:7–8 explains, John the Baptist pointed not to himself as the realization of God's promises; rather, he proclaimed that One greater than he was coming after him. Yes, it was necessary for the covenant people to prepare themselves for the Lord's arrival by repenting for their sins, but the true redemption for which they hoped would come by way of another, namely, one who would baptize God's people "with the Holy Spirit" (v. 8).

Notably, the Old Testament says that the bestowing of the Holy Spirit is accomplished by none other than the Creator Himself, and it also indicates that this outpouring marks the last days when the Lord brings all of His plans and purposes to fruition (Joel 2:28–32). John's identification of Jesus as the One who bestows the Spirit on His people demonstrates that Jesus comes bearing the authority and power of God. Coupled with other texts such as Malachi 3:1, which explains that the promised messenger prepares the way for the Lord Himself, we have a powerful testimony from John regarding the deity of Christ. Furthermore, the Old Testament explains that God led His people in the wilderness by the Holy Spirit after the exodus from Egypt (Isa. 63:10–14). That John in the wilderness foresaw the Spirit coming again also points to Jesus as the leader of a new exodus, one that will accomplish an even greater work of salvation in behalf of His chosen servants. **TE**

JESUS' BAPTISM IN THE JORDAN

MARK 1:9–11 "Jesus came . . . and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'"

Enemies of Christ frequently attack the four Gospels, accusing them of not giving us an accurate account of Jesus' life. In response to these charges, one of the strongest arguments for the historical veracity of the Gospels is their inclusion of stories that would have been set aside if these books had been designed as propaganda. For example, we find in today's passage the account of Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River. Given that John preached "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4), this story raises questions that someone with no interest in history would want to avoid. Christians have always confessed the sinlessness of Christ (see 1 Peter 2:22), so Jesus' baptism introduces potential problems, as on first glance it seems to imply that Jesus needed to repent. Certainly, no believer would have purposely invented such an episode, for to do so introduces unnecessary difficulties. The account of Jesus' baptism indicates that the Evangelists felt bound to tell us what really happened in the life of Christ even if it might raise questions. They were historians as much as they were theologians.

Still, we need to discern why Jesus was baptized if He is, in fact, sinless. First, in light of everything the Bible teaches about our Lord, we must agree with John Calvin that "the general reason why Christ received baptism was, that he might render full obedience to the Father." Jesus saw His baptism as fulfilling "all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15); it was part of His vocation to obey every commandment God gave Israel. As Dr. R.C. Sproul has frequently noted, Christ had to keep every stipulation the Lord has given His people in order to secure a perfect righteousness for us before God. God sent John the Baptist to command the Jews to be baptized in preparation for the arrival of His kingdom, so Jesus, as our Savior, had to keep that command.

Christ's perfectly keeping the law of God falls under the category of what theologians call His "active obedience." It was not enough for Jesus to suffer and die as the substitute for sinners. The atonement provides for our forgiveness, which is of course necessary, but the Lord demands more than a clean slate from us. Just as Adam had to actively obey God in order to pass His probation in the garden (Gen. 2–3), so men and women must have a positive record of righteous obedience in order to be citizens of heaven. By faith alone, Christ's perfect record is credited to us (2 Cor. 5:21). **TE**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Jesus not only died for us; He also lived for our sake. His death on the cross is meaningless without His perfect life of obedience that qualifies Him as the spotless Lamb of God and attains the righteousness for believers that we could never attain for ourselves. Jesus has done what we cannot do, so we can be confident of our salvation if we trust in Him. God the Father sees us in Christ, His Son who never failed, so He cannot cast us out of His kingdom if we receive and rest on Christ alone.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy 5:32
Matthew 5:17
Luke 3:21–22
John 1:24–28

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 17–19
Matthew 5:27–48

TEMPTED IN THE WILDERNESS

MARK 1:12–13 “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

In his commentary *Mark*, Dr. R.C. Sproul notes how Jesus’ victory over temptation in the wilderness would have been particularly relevant to first-century Christians. They faced persecution and death for holding firm to their confession, and in Jesus they had an example of One who refused to worship any but the one true God even when He was promised the kingdoms of the world (Luke 4:5–8). This same Jesus will give us strength to persevere in faith if we seek His face.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Matthew 4:1–11
Romans 5:12–21

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 20–22
Matthew 6

THE WEEKEND

Genesis 23–27
Matthew 7

Immediately after Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit “drove him out into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12). What followed was our Lord’s temptation by Satan, an event that is one of the most important keys for unlocking the meaning of the work of Christ.

Anyone familiar with the Old Testament will quickly see the many parallels between Jesus’ time in the wilderness and the history of Israel. There is an apparent parallel between Jesus’ passing through the water before going into the wilderness, which suggests that we are to see Jesus as the new Israel who fulfills God’s purposes for His old covenant people. Another parallel exists between Israel’s testing for forty years in the wilderness and Jesus’ being tempted for forty days in the same place (Deut. 8:1–2; Mark 1:13). Second, Moses, the representative of Israel, spent forty days on Mount Sinai at a critical point in his ministry. Thus, we see another parallel in that Jesus, the representative of Israel, also spent forty days in the wilderness at a critical point in His ministry (Ex. 24:15–18; Mark 1:13). Furthermore, Elijah, a representative old covenant prophet, also stayed forty days in the wilderness; so, it is appropriate that the chief Prophet, Jesus Christ, parallels Elijah’s life by spending forty days in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:1–8; Mark 1:13).

Hosea 11:1 tells us that old covenant Israel was God’s son by adoption, which further connects Jesus, the Son of God by nature, to Israel’s history. But Scripture also calls Adam the “son of God” (Luke 3:38), so Christ is also the last Adam, the obedient Son who succeeded where Adam failed. Satan, as a serpent, tempted our first parents in Eden, and Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Gen. 3:1–5; Mark 1:13; Rev. 12:9). Yet, whereas Adam fell despite having every advantage in a lush garden, Jesus persevered in the harsh wilderness and never gave in to temptation (Gen. 3:6–7; Luke 4:1–13). He never sinned, thereby guaranteeing the restoration of God’s fallen creation. In Jesus, therefore, God has created a new Israel and a new humanity. Christ embodies everything the Lord created Adam—and all humans—to be, and in Him alone we find our full humanity.

All of these fulfillments happened under the superintendence of our Creator. He created Adam and Israel, and He gave them their missions in which they ultimately failed. He also gave Jesus His mission, driving Him into the wilderness, where He stood against all temptation for the sake of our salvation (Mark 1:12–13). **T**



WEEKEND DEVOTIONAL

JANUARY 9 - 10

IDOL FACTORY

TRILLIA J. NEWBELL

There’s something about marriage that squeezes out the good, the bad, and the ugly of the heart. I remember thinking I was a decent human being ... until I got married. One main thing that I didn’t realize was that I had many passions and desires that would wage war within me and pour out when I wasn’t getting what I desired. Many of those things were trivial, but they would tempt me to anger and quarreling. What the Lord kindly revealed early on in my marriage was that these things weren’t merely desires—they were deadly idols.

In ancient times, people didn’t hide their idols. They were out there and plain to see. This is illustrated as Isaiah pokes fun at what an idol is compared to the real God:

To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move. (Isa. 40:18–20)

These manufacturers and buyers weren’t trying to put their idols away so that no one would see them. It was clear whom they worshiped. Notice also that no one was exempt from trying to purchase and craft an idol. Everyone did it.

Today, we are skilled at masking our idols. We even excuse them as “preferences.” But at the heart of idolatry is forgetting who God is and worshiping self.

Idols are the passions that James addresses

that make us wage war, judge, or hate others (James 4:1–4). They become more important to us than loving our neighbor as ourselves. We forget the Scriptures. We forget how to love, and we instead make war, complain, and become envious. Whatever the specific result, it’s not the fruit of the Spirit that we so long for.

Isaiah goes on to tell us about something so much better than our idols. Take a minute and read through Isaiah 40:21–26. The makeshift idols of the human heart are not worth comparing with the God of heaven and earth:

To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. (vv. 25–26)

Doesn’t this passage make you want to worship our one true God? Who can compare to Him? No one. Nothing. We worship at the altar of our desires, but there’s someone so much greater and better. So, during those times when our idols rear their ugly heads, we pray and ask God to reveal Himself even more mightily. He’s already changed our heart of stone to a heart of flesh. We can rest assured that He will finish the work He began—including helping us put away our idolatry. **T**

TRILLIA J. NEWBELL is director of community outreach for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, a conference speaker, and author of *Fear and Faith* and *United*.

JESUS PREACHES THE GOSPEL

MARK 1:14–15 “After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

The gospel is not a message that “you can have your best life now”; that “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life”; or that you must “ask Jesus into your heart.”

Some of these statements may be true if qualified properly, but none of them is the gospel. The gospel is Jesus Christ—who He is and what He has done. If we are not preaching that, we are not preaching the gospel.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 53
Mark 8:31
1 Timothy 3:16
Hebrews 9:11–28

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 28–29
Matthew 8:1–17

Mark begins his narrative of the life of Jesus by telling us that his book is focused on “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). Yet that opening verse does not explain the actual content of the gospel beyond noting the fact that Jesus is God’s Son. Today’s passage starts to unfold the gospel—the good news—in more detail, focusing more on Jesus Himself than on the words that He spoke.

To be sure, Mark summarizes what Jesus preached after His baptism (v. 15). Before doing that, however, the evangelist defines our Lord’s proclamation as “the gospel of God.” Here, the emphasis is not so much on the gospel as good news about God, though certainly the gospel does reveal to us various truths about our Creator. Instead, Mark’s focus is on the gospel as a message from God. It is His message, finding its origin in His salvific purposes and given first to Christ and then to His church as something to be guarded, proclaimed, and passed on unchanged from generation to generation. This is the same sense in which the Apostle Paul speaks of the good news of salvation as being “the gospel of God” in Romans 1:1. As we will see, this gospel from God concerns the person and work of Christ, but as the Father and Son are always perfectly united in every one of God’s works, the gospel is not only *about* the Son. It is also *from* the Son as much as it is from the Father. It finds its origin in eternity past when the three persons of the Trinity purposed to glorify themselves by saving a people for themselves (John 3:16; 6:37–40).

We have noted that Mark focuses more on Jesus Himself than on the content of His teaching. Consider Mark 1:15, which features only the briefest summary of Jesus’ preaching. But Mark’s gospel as a whole also records fewer of our Lord’s parables and other teachings than the works of the other three evangelists. Mark means to point out that in an important sense, who Jesus is and what He does is of supreme importance. The gospel is Jesus Christ—specifically, His person and work. Matthew, Luke, and John agree, for even in the teaching they record, the emphasis is on Christ Himself as the foundation for eternal life and the only way to a right relationship with the Father (for example, Matt. 7:24–27; Luke 24:27; John 14:6). This Jesus came at just the right moment, when the times and seasons of the Father had been fulfilled and His people were well prepared for the Messiah’s coming (Mark 1:14–15). 

JESUS CALLS HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

MARK 1:16–20 “Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men’” (vv. 16–17).

Galilee was where Jesus began His public ministry after His baptism by John (Mark 1:14–15), so it is no surprise that the first disciples He called were Galileans. What we might not have expected, however, is that these Galileans first called by our Lord were not experts in the Scriptures nor renowned Jewish theologians; rather, our Savior called successful businessmen to serve Him. We are accustomed to viewing Andrew, Simon, and the sons of Zebedee as fishermen, and indeed they were (vv. 16–20). Yet these were not individuals who barely eked out a living. In the first century, fish was one of the staple foods of the Mediterranean world, and fish from the Sea of Galilee were in high demand. Fishing the Sea of Galilee was a lucrative occupation, so James, John, Andrew, and Simon left much behind to follow Jesus.

Anyone can be a disciple of Jesus, for the term *disciple* simply means “learner.” However, not everyone can be an Apostle, for one must be a witness to the resurrection to be called to that office (Acts 1:21–22; 1 Cor. 15:7–9). Thus, while the four men named in today’s passage were certainly disciples, they would also become Apostles. John Calvin highlights this fact in his commentary on Mark 1:16–20. True, Calvin says, Jesus called these men to be His disciples, but His words “I will make you become fishers of men” indicate that our Lord was also calling them to a specific office that is not shared by all believers. Christ may call many people to be His disciples without taking them from their existing vocations, but those whom He appointed to the Apostolic office He set apart from their previous work. As the office of Apostle passed away when the last Apostle died at the end of the first century, the Lord does not appoint anyone today to the Apostolic vocation. Calvin applies the words of Jesus more broadly, however, noting that God still calls some disciples to remain where they are and others to take on the public office of elder in His church.

This public office involves becoming “fishers of men,” those who devote their lives to raising up other disciples through instruction in the things of God. Such a call means participating with the Lord in His activity of fishing, which the prophets saw as God’s catching men and women for judgment (Ezek. 29:4). Those who become fishers of men are catching people for judgment, that is, preparing them to be ready to meet the Lord unafraid on the last day by instructing them to live lives of faith and repentance. 



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

God has called elders, teachers, and other Christian leaders to be fishers of men—to prepare men and women for judgment day by calling them to repentance and instructing them in biblical truth. However, while ordained church officers have a special role to play in this, the task of calling people to repentance and faith so that they can stand before God unafraid is given to all Christians to fulfill, insofar as they are able, wherever they are (Matt. 28:18–20).

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1 Kings 19:19–21
Isaiah 8:16
John 1:35–42
Acts 9:1–31

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 30–31
Matthew 8:18–34

“We call this book the Reformation Study Bible. What we want to see happen is a Bible study reformation.”

— DR. R.C. SPROUL
General Editor



ReformationStudyBible.com

Now available in digital and print editions wherever books are sold.

Hardcover
with slipcase

White, ESV
Crimson, ESV

Leather-Like
with slipcase

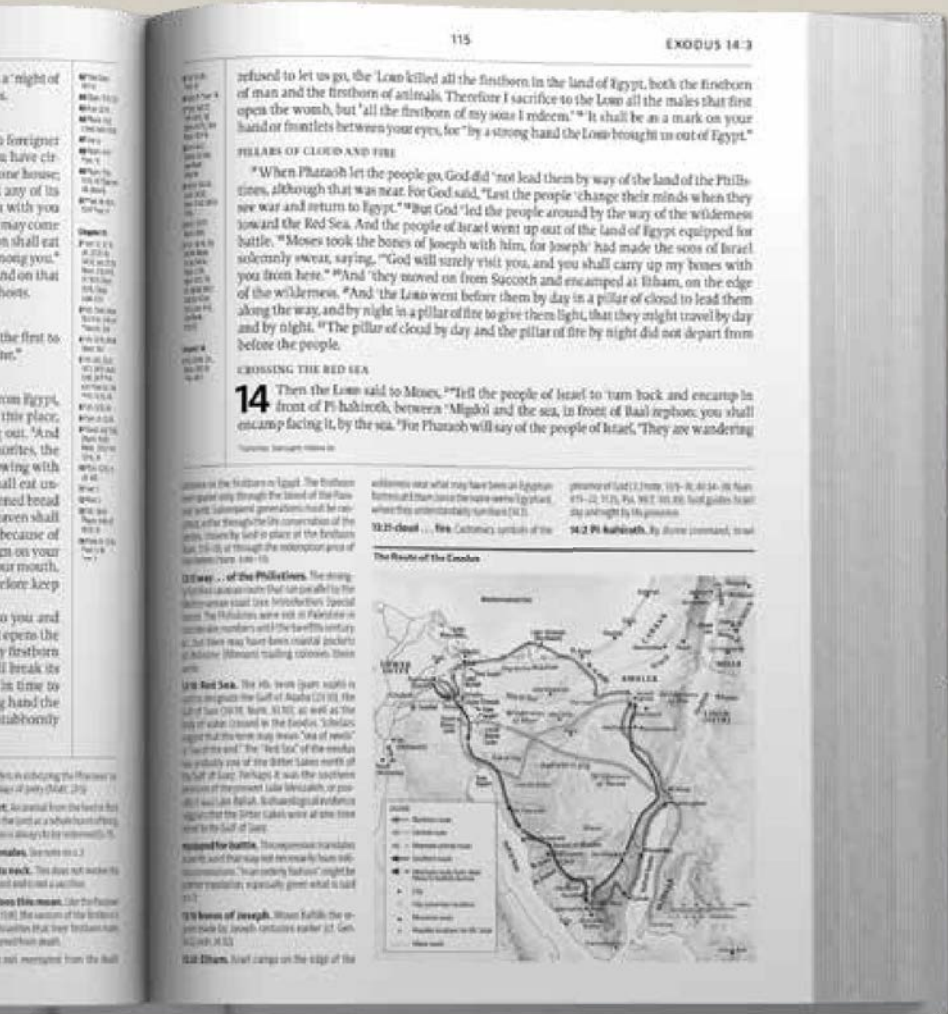
Light Gray, ESV
Light Brown, ESV
NEW Brick Red, ESV

Genuine Leather
with slipcase

Black, ESV
Burgundy, ESV

Premium Leather
with cloth gift box

Black, ESV
NEW Brown, ESV



TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY

MARK 1:21–22 “And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Jesus is often regarded as a good teacher, but as many Christian apologists have noted, we insult Christ if we view Him as merely a good teacher. Our Lord was not simply a wise moral philosopher; rather, He spoke with divine authority. What He says, therefore, must be believed. His Words are truth itself, and if we do not heed what He says, then we will find ourselves outside of His kingdom on the last day.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy 28:1–14
Matthew 7:24–29
John 6:66–69
1 Timothy 6:2b–10

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 32–33
Matthew 9:1–17

The four Gospels reveal that Jesus amazed people during His earthly ministry in two main ways. First, the signs and wonders He performed were unlike anything they had ever seen (Mark 4:35–41; John 11:38–45). Second, people were awestruck by our Lord’s teaching, both by the insight of His interpretation of the Old Testament (Matt. 22:23–33) and by His evident authority.

Mark tells us that people were astonished at the authority of Jesus when He taught at the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21–22). This important Galilean city was located on the main trade route between Damascus and the Mediterranean coastal plain, making it an ideal home base of sorts for our Lord’s ministry. In Capernaum, Jesus could teach local Jews and those who were passing through on their way elsewhere. With respect to authority, the Jews paid heed to the teaching of the scribes, who occupied an important place in first-century Jewish society. Scribes were experts in the Old Testament law, and the people regarded their Scriptural interpretations as binding. Because of this, and because scribes took care of the scrolls on which the Bible was written, scribes held seats of honor in the synagogues. One had to be a scribe to sit on the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Jews, and the scribes also served as civil lawyers. In any case, the scribes taught by citing the opinions of various rabbis on different matters, appealing not to their own authority but to the authority of others.

Christ, on the other hand, did not appeal to the authority of various rabbis when He instructed the people. Rather, as Matthew Henry comments, Jesus taught “as one that knew the mind of God, and was commissioned to declare it.” Mark does not record as much of Jesus’ instruction as the other gospels do, so let us consider passages such as Matthew 5:21–48 in order to get an idea of what it meant for Jesus to teach with authority. There, we read how Jesus contrasted His understanding of the old covenant Scriptures with the understanding of the scribes. He did not quote the teachings of the scribes and rabbis as binding, but He expected others to see His teaching as superseding theirs. In fact, He taught with the authority of God Himself. The Greek word *exousia*, translated “authority” in Mark 1:22, is typically used in the Bible for God’s own authority. Jesus did not rely on the expertise of others. He spoke the very words of our Creator (see John 12:49–50). **■**

CASTING OUT DEMONS

MARK 1:23–28 “Immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.’ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him” (vv. 23–26).

Among the other Jewish teachers who worked in the first century, Jesus stands out for the ways in which His practices differed from those of His contemporaries. In yesterday’s study, we noted how Christ spoke with an authority that was unparalleled. He possessed divine authority to reveal the true meaning of the Scriptures and the plans of His Father (John 12:49–50). Jesus also stands out in His calling of His disciples. As we saw in Mark 1:16–20, Jesus called His disciples to follow Him; they did not seek Him out. Other first-century rabbis did no such thing. Instead, men who wanted to be their disciples would seek out their rabbi of choice. In keeping with His authority, Jesus commanded men and women to follow Him; He did not wait for them to find Him.

In today’s passage, we read of yet another way in which Jesus differed from the other Jewish teachers who were popular in first-century Palestine. Mark 1:23–28 records the first of many exorcisms that Jesus performed during His earthly ministry. We must note that Jesus is not the only first-century teacher to whom exorcisms are attributed; other rabbis were known for casting out demons. What sets our Lord apart is the manner in which He exorcised evil spirits. Other exorcists relied on particular procedures to help oppressed people and by no means worked on the basis of their own inherent authority. As we see in today’s text, however, Jesus simply commanded unclean spirits to leave. All the demon had to hear was the sound of the Lord’s voice and the order to depart, and it fled. In so doing, the demon acknowledged who Jesus was—“the Holy One of God” sent to bring Satan’s kingdom to its knees. Although the ESV renders verse 24b as a question, it is likely that it was a statement. (Punctuation, to some degree, is a translator’s choice, as the original Greek manuscripts do not contain it.) If so, the Spirit said something like, “You have come to destroy us!”

Regardless of the punctuation, the exorcism demonstrates that the kingdom of God at hand in Jesus’ ministry had to come first in the cosmic arena. The Lord came to break oppression, establish justice, and heal the diseased (Luke 4:16–21), but this could not happen until the forces of evil were defeated and the “strong man” was bound (Mark 3:27). Christ came to set things in creation right, and this demanded that He conquer the devil, who had enslaved the world in sin and darkness. **■**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

As Romans 8:19–21 indicates, the salvation that Jesus brings will encompass even the physical order. That cannot happen, however, until Christ deals with the evil powers that hold creation hostage. Jesus dealt the decisive blow of victory on the cross, and now He sets people free from the devil’s tyranny as the gospel goes forth. We are called to pray for this gospel to succeed wherever it goes that God’s elect will be freed to serve Him in gladness.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 61
Matthew 8:16
Luke 11:20
Ephesians 6:10–20

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 34–35
Matthew 9:18–38

MARK 1:29–34 “That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him” (vv. 32–34).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Several biblical texts show us God’s sovereignty in revealing Himself. Our Creator does not show Himself on demand; rather, He chooses to reveal Himself and His purposes when He sees fit. This happened during Jesus’ ministry when He would not let others speak of Him. It happens today, as God chooses when and where to reveal His salvation to His elect and call them to faith through His Word. God is wise in how He reveals Himself, so let us not demand that He act on our timetable.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Jeremiah 33:6
Malachi 4:2

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 36–37
Matthew 10:1–24

THE WEEKEND

Genesis 38–43
Matthew 10:25–11:15

Having exorcised an unclean spirit from a man in Capernaum’s synagogue, Jesus departs for the “house of Simon and Andrew” (Mark 1:29). Jesus probably lived there during His stay in Capernaum, and He would have been quite welcome in that home because of an episode recorded in today’s passage.

Upon entering the home of Simon, who is better known to us as the Apostle Peter, Jesus finds that Peter’s mother-in-law is sick with a fever (vv. 29–30). We do not know the precise nature of the ailment, but Jesus addresses it at once, taking the woman by the hand and restoring her to health. She then does what anyone who has been redeemed by Jesus does—she serves Him (v. 31).

Yet Jesus heals many others in Capernaum in addition to Peter’s mother-in-law. At sundown, many people in the city bring Him their friends and relatives who are sick or being oppressed by demons (v. 32). Why sundown? Recall that Jesus has been teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath (v. 21), which is reckoned from sundown to sundown. In other words, the people come for help once the Sabbath is over, at which point work is permissible once more. Perhaps they have been influenced by the Pharisees to believe healing is not allowed on the Sabbath because it is a form of labor, a subject about which Jesus will soon have something to say (3:1–6).

Mark informs us that in the process of these healings, Jesus “would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him” (1:34b). He did this often in His early ministry, forbidding people to tell of His works or to reveal His identity (for example, v. 44; 5:43; 8:30). This command to be silent has puzzled many commentators, but it is easier to understand when we consider first-century Jewish society and the type of mission Jesus was engaged in. First-century Palestine was part of the Roman Empire, and most Jews were not very happy to be under the rule of the caesar. Many uprisings against Rome occurred in the era, led by Jews who claimed to be the Messiah, and they invited swift reprisals from the Romans. To broadcast Jesus’ works and identity might have attracted the attention of the Roman armies and brought an end to His ministry before it was time. Furthermore, John Calvin comments that Jesus did not allow Himself to be identified “because the time of the full revelation was not yet come.” He could not be revealed in His fullness until the cross, for the cross reveals the Messiah of Isaiah 53 clearly. **T**



WEEKEND DEVOTIONAL
JANUARY 16 - 17

LEARN TO SAY ‘THANK YOU’

RICHARD L. PRATT JR.

Ibought my grandson his first baseball, bat, and glove today, and he muttered a necessary “Thanks.” So, I stopped him and said, “Look me in the eyes; put a smile on your face and say, ‘Thanks, Pops! This is great!’” After a few tries, he finally got it. Even when children know they should say “thank you,” we still have to teach them how to express their thanks effectively. Something like this is true for God’s children as well, no matter what age we may be. Psalm 34:1–10 is a well-known example of thanksgiving that God’s people have recited and imitated for millennia.

ATTITUDE OF THANKSGIVING

Take a look at the attitude of someone who is thankful in verses 1–3 of Psalm 34. Something had happened in David’s life that he simply could not stop talking about. He was so excited that he also wanted others to join with him in exalting the name of God.

It isn’t hard to see the attitude behind these words. How do we normally react when wonderful things happen in our lives? Do parents of a newborn child simply keep their joy to themselves? Of course not. They talk and talk.

The same sort of thing is true of followers of Christ who have a thankful attitude toward God. We pay attention to good things that Jesus has done for us and we become so enthusiastic that we cannot be silent.

WORDS OF THANKSGIVING

Psalm 34:4–7 goes on to give us a fascinating way of putting a thankful attitude into words. It tells us that one of the best ways to say “thank you” to God is to tell the story

of what He has done. Unlike other psalms, David’s story in Psalm 34 amounts to only a few snippets. God had answered his prayer and delivered him. He had cried out and God had saved him from his troubles. But as brief as David may be here, the point is not lost: if you want to say “thank you” to God, come before Him in the presence of family and friends and tell the stories of what He has done.

I have a friend who took his extended family on a long, expensive trip. And all along the way, no one stopped to thank him. “But a few weeks later,” he told me, “we sat down with photos from the trip. And the kids told stories after stories of what had happened.” Then my friend went on to say, “They didn’t even realize it, but every story said ‘thank you’ to me.” This is how our stories about God say “thank you” to Him.

RESULTS OF THANKSGIVING

The result of David’s thanksgiving at that moment in his life was not only to honor God; it did something to him as well. In verse 10 he writes, “The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.” Wouldn’t you like to appraise your own life in this way, even in the face of terrible trials? Follow the advice of the old hymn: “Count your many blessings. Name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord has done!” **T**

DR. RICHARD L. PRATT JR. is president of Third Millennium Ministries, adjunct professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, and author of *He Gave Us Stories*.

THE PURPOSE OF JESUS' MINISTRY

MARK 1:35–39 “Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, ‘Everyone is looking for you.’ And he said to them, ‘Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out’ ” (vv. 36–38).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

If Jesus, who is the Son of God incarnate, found it so necessary to pray, shouldn't we also pray? Fellowship with the Lord in prayer is an absolute necessity if we will be sustained in life and ministry over the long haul. This is true whether we minister as pastors, in secular workplaces, or in our homes.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Ezra 7:10
Psalm 68:11–14
Luke 4:42–44
Romans 10:14–15

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 44–45
Matthew 11:16–30

Contrary to the beliefs of many people in the first century and even in our era, the primary purpose of Jesus in coming to earth to minister was not to heal the sick or perform other signs and wonders. As important as these tasks were, they were secondary to His mission of preaching the truth. That is what we read in today's passage. When Simon and the other disciples came to Jesus to encourage Him in His ministry of healing, pointing out the fact that many people were looking for Him, Jesus did not decide to stay in Capernaum and continue healing. He instead said that it was time for Him to preach in other Galilean towns, for His reason for coming was to preach (Mark 1:36–38).

Specifically, Jesus came to preach the very thing Mark described in 1:14–15, namely, the gospel of God. The signs and wonders our Lord performed testified to the truth of His message, but they were not ends in themselves. In fact, a miracle does no ultimate good for the people who receive it if they reject the gospel. Preaching the truth about the kingdom of God and how one may receive it by trusting only in Christ formed the bulk of His message, and this message of faith and repentance surpassed all of Jesus' miracles in terms of importance. Note, however, that this message cannot be separated from His work of atonement. Jesus “came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:1–10), and this salvation comes through the pouring out of His blood “for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:26–29). In coming to preach the gospel of God, Jesus came to preach Himself. He came as both the messenger and the message—without the atonement, there is no good news to proclaim. And when this good news is proclaimed accurately, it pushes back the kingdom of darkness, as we see in the mention of exorcisms alongside Jesus' preaching ministry in Mark 1:39.

Christ did not go out on this preaching ministry in greater Galilee until He first spent time praying in “a desolate place” (v. 35). This setting was similar to the wilderness in which Jesus was tempted by Satan but stood firm against the devil's attacks and received sustenance from His Father (Matt. 4:1–11). Jesus' going out to pray represented His seeking the face of His Father to sustain Him in His resolve to complete the mission God gave Him, to be prepared inwardly and spiritually so that He could exercise His outward preaching ministry. **TC**

THE DISOBEDIENT LEPER

MARK 1:40–45 “Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, and said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them’ ” (vv. 43–44).

Legal regulations pertaining to ceremonial purity abound in the law of Moses, with the laws about leprosy being perhaps some of the most well known of these rules. Under the old covenant, the affliction of leprosy—which actually refers in Scripture to a variety of skin conditions—rendered a person unclean. Consequently, lepers had to take precautions to prevent the spread of their disease. They had to keep their distance from others and live outside the camp, away from the place of God's special presence (Lev. 13:45–46). The leper could reenter the camp once healed, but first the priest had to conduct a close investigation of the leprous man or woman and offer sacrifices to restore the person to ritual purity (chaps. 13–14). But the law could only provide regulations for recognizing the disease, verifying when it was gone, and outlining ritual procedures for restoring the person's ceremonial cleanness. It could not actually cure the person of leprosy, which was required if the leper was ever to be restored to the community.

The impotence of the Mosaic law to effect cleansing is seen in today's passage when Jesus provides the healing that the old covenant stipulations never could. There is much to observe in this text. First, although contact with a leper ordinarily makes the non-diseased person unclean as well, Jesus is not rendered unclean when He touches the leper. Instead, Jesus retains His purity and extends it to a man in desperate need (Mark 1:41–42). Second, note the humble faith of the leper. He does not come demanding that our Lord heal him or doubting whether Jesus could restore him; rather, He confesses Jesus' ability and notes that the Savior's exercise of it depends entirely on His sovereignty (v. 40).

We also see that the leper's faith, while strong, is imperfect, for it does not produce immediate obedience. After healing him, Jesus “sternly” charges the man not to tell anyone in Galilee but to go to the priest right away (v. 44). Why does the Lord issue this charge in a stern tone? One commentator says that He likely does so because of His knowledge that the cleansed man will disobey Him. In any case, the former leper begins telling everyone, and Jesus becomes so sought after that He cannot openly enter the nearby towns to preach the good news (v. 45). But knowing that this will happen, our Lord heals the man anyway, which is a remarkable display of His patience, compassion, and grace to undeserving sinners. **TC**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Our Lord's grace and compassion is also seen in His reaction to the leprous man. Some manuscripts of Mark 1:41 state that Jesus was moved by anger, not pity. Dr. R.C. Sproul explains our Lord's anger: “He was filled with a righteous indignation against the ravages of the fallen world, such as disease. He hated disease, but He cared for the person afflicted by the disease.” Christ hates what sin has done to His creation, and He is full of compassion for those who suffer the effects of the fall.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

2 Kings 5:1–14
2 Chronicles 26:16–23
Matthew 8:1–4
Luke 5:12–16

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 46–47
Matthew 12:1–32

THE FAITH OF THE FRIENDS

MARK 2:1–5 “When they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven’” (vv. 4–5).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

John Calvin comments that the paralytic's friends “would never have submitted to so much trouble, nor contended with such formidable hindrances, if they had not derived courage from entire confidence of success. The fruit of their faith appeared in their not being wearied out when they found the entrance closed up on all sides.” These men were so sure of Jesus' ability that they would stop at nothing to see Him. May we pursue our Savior with such fervent faith.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1 Kings 17:8–16
Matthew 15:21–28
Luke 7:1–10
Philippians 3:12–16

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 48–49
Matthew 12:33–50

T rue faith takes risks and will stop at nothing to reach the object of faith. We have seen this in the account of Jesus' healing of the leper, who did not allow social convention or ceremonial law to keep him from the Savior (Mark 1:40–45). He recognized the author of the law and knew that He had the power to do what the law in itself could not; thus, his approaching Jesus honored the spirit of the law, for He sought out the One to whom the law points.

We find another remarkable example of the lengths to which true faith is willing to go in today's passage. This familiar account is set at a home in Capernaum, where our Lord has returned after ministering in greater Galilee (1:35–39; 2:1). This is likely the home of Simon and Andrew, the place where Jesus seems to have resided during his previous stay in Capernaum (1:21–34). By now, many people have heard of Jesus, and a crowd of people has come to the door of the home to hear Him preach the gospel (2:2).

However, this gathering presents a problem for a paralyzed man and four of his friends. Knowing that Jesus is present, these friends have carried the paralytic to the house so that Jesus might heal him, but there are so many people that they cannot make their way to our Savior (2:3–4). Perhaps they try maneuvering through the gathered throng. Maybe they cry out, hoping Jesus will hear them. Regardless, they find the way to Jesus blocked.

Under such circumstances, it would be easy for these men to go away, hoping that Jesus will be available later to help their friend. But faith knows that tomorrow is not guaranteed, that today is the day of salvation when Jesus is present. So, they climb on the roof. Typical of roofs in first-century Palestine, the structure is flat and covered with hard mud that they have to dig through (the literal meaning of “made an opening” in v. 4) to get access to the Lord.

If true prophets are identified by their good fruit (Matt. 7:15–23), surely we can discern something of the inward condition of others by their actions. Of course, we must see fruit over a long period of time in order to be reasonably certain of the state of another person's heart, and even then we lack the omniscience required for absolute certainty. Jesus knows no such limitations, and seeing the fruit of faith in the friends' stopping at nothing to reach Him tells Him faith is surely present. So, Jesus pardons the paralytic's sins, which causes controversy, as we will see in tomorrow's study (Mark 2:5). **IT**

FORGIVENESS AND HEALING

MARK 2:6–12 “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—he said to the paralytic—I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home” (vv. 9–11).

C ompassion for the sick, the oppressed, and those otherwise in need is a defining feature of our Lord's character. We see this in texts such as Exodus 2:23–25, wherein God hears the cries of the Israelites and remembers His covenant with them, purposing to save them from bondage. Another example is Deuteronomy 15, which warns us not to harden our hearts against the poor.

But the compassion of our Creator is not impotent empathy or something that addresses only the surface-level problems of illness, oppression, and poverty. Instead, God has acted to address the root cause of all ills, namely, our sin. These ills are not in every case tied directly to specific transgressions—people are not necessarily sick, poor, or enslaved to others because of their personal sin. However, all of these problems exist ultimately because our world is fallen, because our sin has brought forth God's curse and the attendant suffering (Gen. 3:16–19). Unless this root cause is addressed, any solution to illness, oppression, and other problems is temporary at best.

Forgiveness is our most critical need. We must be reconciled to our Creator (Rom. 1:18–5:1). So, before He does anything else, Jesus forgives the sins of the paralyzed man who is lowered through the roof (Mark 2:1–5). As with the man born blind (John 9:1–3), the man's paralysis may not be a direct result of his own sin. Still, restoring his mobility is ultimately useless if he remains estranged from his Creator. In Mark 2:1–12, the greatest evidence of Christ's compassion is in His gracious pardoning of the paralyzed man. Without such mercy, the man will suffer the eternal death of hell.

Jesus' proclamation of forgiveness prompts the scribes to believe He is blaspheming by putting Himself in God's place. If our Lord were a mere man, they would of course be correct. Only God can forgive the sins committed against Him, so to pronounce forgiveness is to make an implicit claim to be equal to God (vv. 6–7). But the scribes' charge of blasphemy was false because Christ, though fully human, is not merely human. He is God incarnate (John 1:1–18), so He possesses the divine authority to pardon transgression. He verifies this authority by healing the man (Mark 2:8–12). His declaration of forgiveness is not mere wishful thinking but is as effectual to pardon the paralyzed man as His healing word is effectual to restore the man's ability to walk. **IT**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Forgiveness is our greatest need. Disease, depression, sorrow, poverty, injustice, and all other ills are true needs; ultimately, however, all these ills exist because sin has corrupted creation.

Not all of our problems are caused by our specific sins, but all of them are due to the fact that we live in a fallen world and suffer from sin's corruption. If we are not saved from our sins, any fix to these problems is temporary and hell awaits us. Have you trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 46
Zephaniah 3:17
Zechariah 9:14–16
Matthew 1:18–25

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 50–Exodus 1
Matthew 13:1–23

HEBREWS 11:1–2 “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.”



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

As we have seen, biblical faith is not naive wish fulfillment that believes in something just because it makes us feel better. Neither does it involve believing despite the evidence. Instead, biblical faith is confident trust in an objective but unseen reality for which there is much evidence. Christians have grounds to believe what they believe, and therefore we are not being irrational to believe in God and His raising of Jesus from the dead.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1 Chronicles 10:13–14
1 Thessalonians 1:2–5

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Exodus 2–4
Matthew 13:24–58

THE WEEKEND

Exodus 5–10
Matthew 14:1–21

Faith is a critical biblical concept. Paul defines it as one of the three chief Christian virtues (1 Cor. 13:13). Habakkuk reveals that “the righteous shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4). “By grace [we] have been saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8). Jesus recognized the great faith of the paralyzed man who was lowered through the roof and that of his friends (Mark 2:1–12). Given our Lord’s commendation of faith, it is important for us to have a good grasp of this virtue. We will now pause our study of Mark’s gospel to look more closely at what the Bible says about faith. Dr. R.C. Sproul will guide us through his teaching series *Faith: The Evidence of Things Unseen*.

Hebrews 11:1–2 defines faith in terms of assurance and conviction. It is “the assurance of things hoped for.” Let us be clear on what Scripture means by the term *hope*. In everyday English, we use the term *hope* for things that we want to see happen but are uncertain as to whether they will actually occur. Three-year-old Jonathan might say that he hopes to get a toy fire truck for Christmas because he wants it, but he may not receive it. Biblical hope, however, includes no uncertainty. It pertains to the future, but the future to which it looks is certain. Scripturally speaking, we hope for such things as the resurrection of the dead because it is a certain event that is yet to come. We are sure that this and every other divine promise of the future will be fulfilled because we know the Lord’s trustworthy character (Ps. 22:5). Faith is the assurance of this hope because it gives what lies ahead a present reality. Faith means that we are confident today that what God has pledged to do for His people will come to pass. Hope, because it is certain, is a sure anchor for the soul that grants us subjective assurance—the personal, confident knowledge that the Lord will keep His Word (Heb. 6:13–20).

Since faith pertains to our future hope, which is yet unseen, it is understandable that faith is also described as “the conviction [‘evidence,’ in other versions] of things not seen” (11:1). We trust in things not directly accessible to our five senses, but that does not mean our faith lacks evidence. We believe based on the testimony of eyewitnesses who have seen and touched Christ (2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:1–5). Faith is not blind credulity or belief for the sake of making us feel good. It is the conviction of things unseen based on the witness of reliable prophets and Apostles who had a firsthand encounter with the things—and with the Person—in which we trust. **T**



WEEKEND DEVOTIONAL
JANUARY 23 - 24

ASKING QUESTIONS

JOE THORN

When we’re confused or lost, we often ask questions. Many saints throughout history have sought answers from God by asking questions—even within Scripture itself. Asking these questions is a work of faith, for we know God has the answers. When we ask questions of God and look to Scripture for the answers, our faith is strengthened.

Throughout Scripture, we see the people of God struggling under the weight of difficult circumstances and trials. When David is suffering at the hands of ungodly men, he cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest” (Ps. 22:1–2). David knows the Lord, and he knows that He is a God who saves. But here he is groaning in pain, feeling alone and at risk. He asks God questions in the trials of his life.

In Psalm 73, Asaph sees the prosperity and comfort of the wicked in contrast to the poverty and misery of the righteous, and his understanding of God as good is challenged. His whole life of faith feels as though it is pointless. So he cries out, “All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning” (Ps. 73:13–14). Asaph has good theology, but life is pushing against it. His questioning, like David’s, doesn’t lead him away from the truth, but back to it.

Why are we suffering? What is God doing?

Where is justice? Why do I feel so alone? God, have you forgotten me? These questions do not come out of nowhere, but stem from knowing the promises of God without finding the experience of those promises in the valley of the shadow of death. When we are ignorant, afraid, or afflicted, it is good to ask questions in order to rediscover the truth we may be losing sight of. In every trial, we have the choice to grit our teeth and bear the burdens and questions in our hearts alone, or we can take them all to the God who answers us.

When we ask questions in our pain, we are looking for the God who is there. It is the longing to see God act in ways He has said He will. When we ask questions humbly, we are not denying His character, but seeking the God who has revealed Himself to be just, merciful, good, and loving. When we pray—especially in our suffering—we raise our voices in a plea for God to answer us, waiting in faith that He will in His perfect providence. Let us not doubt.

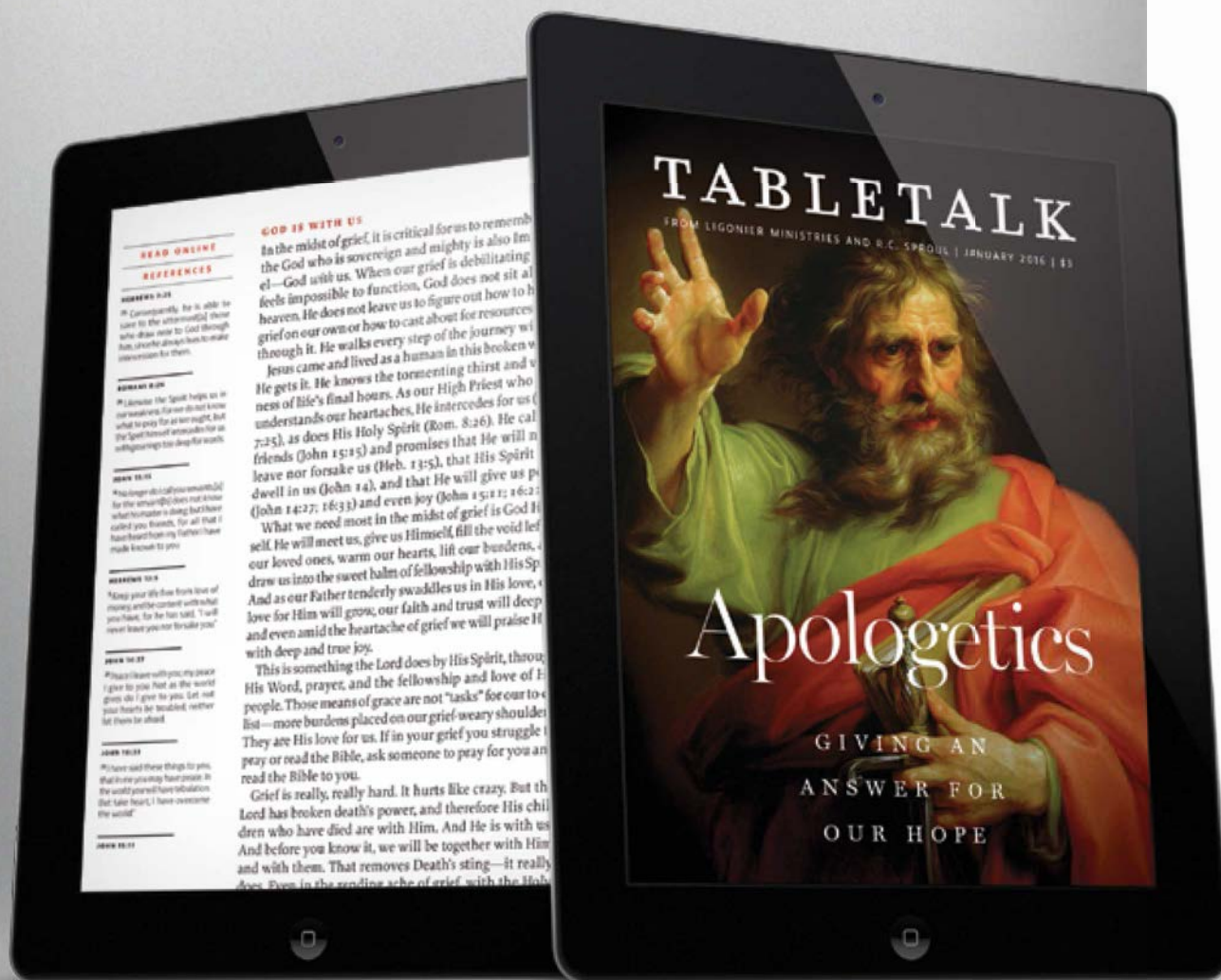
What makes our questions an act of faith and beneficial to our souls is the readiness of our hearts to hear God in His Word, to trust what He has said about Himself despite what we think we see happening in our lives. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Prov. 3:5–6). **T**

REV. JOE THORN is founding and lead pastor of Redeemer Fellowship in St. Charles, Ill. He is author of *Note to Self and Experiencing the Trinity*.



New Features in Digital Tabletalk

Digital Tabletalk now includes additional online content and Scripture references for ease of study. As a benefit to print subscribers, you can access issues on your iPad, Kindle Fire, and Android tablet. Share your print edition with family and friends and search for Tabletalk in your tablet's app store today.



GetTabletalk.com/Digital

FAITH AND GOD'S REWARDS

HEBREWS 11:3–7 “Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (v. 6).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Christian faith is more than just belief that God exists. It does not take any special gift of faith to believe in the existence of the Creator, for many people have lived and died believing that God exists even though they never became Christians. Biblical faith involves believing also the specific promises of God. We must believe God, not simply believe in God. Ask the Lord this day to strengthen your faith in His promises so that you will continue to trust in Him alone.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalms 19:7–11
Matthew 7:15–23
2 Corinthians 5:6–9
1 Thessalonians 4:1–12

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Exodus 11–13
Matthew 14:22–36

Christopher Hitchens, the late atheist journalist and noted writer, once said that “faith is the surrender of the mind; it’s the surrender of reason.” One does not have to be an atheist to agree with him, for there are many religious people and even many Christians who would agree that faith and reason are opposed. Yet while this view is common, it manifests ignorance regarding what Christian theologians have said throughout history about the relationship of faith and reason. Great thinkers such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas have distinguished faith and reason, but they have not declared them enemies. In fact, faith and reason live together harmoniously when both are rightly exercised. Since all truth is God’s truth, faith and reason are ultimately friends, not enemies.

Today’s passage tells us that it is an article of faith that the Lord created the world out of that which is invisible (Heb. 11:3). Indeed this is so, for faith pertains to unseen realities and none of us witnessed the creation of the universe. But the right use of reason also leads to the conclusion that the Creator made the world *ex nihilo*—from no preexisting substance. The laws of cause and effect tell us that there must be a self-existent cause, a first mover that is not itself an effect but the primary cause of all other things. Because the heavens declare God’s glory (Ps. 19:1), a truly rational examination of the universe will never lead to atheism.

Belief that God exists is the inevitable result of the right exercise of reason, but it is also part and parcel of Christian faith. But true faith is not exhausted by the mere belief that there is a Creator. Faith also believes that this Creator “rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Christian faith is trust in a person who has made certain promises, and these promises include His pledge that He will reward everyone who follows His instruction (Deut. 28:1–14; Matt. 6:1–6). We cannot really trust God if we do not believe what He promises, just as we cannot really trust other human beings if we doubt what they say.

Certainly, this does not mean that our good works or even our trust itself earns our right standing with the Lord. Christ Himself is the One who does this. Faith is simply the instrument by which we lay hold of Christ, and this faith is outwardly demonstrated by the obedience to God that is born of trust in His name (Isa. 29:13; Heb. 11:4–5, 7; James 2:14–26). 

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

HEBREWS 11:8–22 “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” (v. 13).

God’s self-revelation in Scripture does not come to us as just one book or one genre of literature. Scripture contains sixty-six different books and many literary genres that together give us a rich and multifaceted depiction of our Creator and the life of faith. For a realistic explanation of how faith works itself out in the lives of ordinary sinners, few portions of the Bible give a clearer picture than the Old Testament narratives. In these stories, we read of adulterers, thieves, liars, murderers, and tyrants who were transformed by God and who persevered in faith even though they sometimes fell back into sinful patterns. In other words, we relate easily to these stories because they are about people just like us.

One thing the Old Testament makes particularly clear is that passionate faith and the sometimes brutal nature of reality go hand in hand. So often we see that turmoil was the crucible in which the faith of the old covenant saints was formed. The greatest Old Testament examples of trust in God are found in accounts of the most difficult of circumstances, just as we find in our own day.

Hebrews 11 gives us many examples of faith as it comments on the lives of several faithful old covenant men and women. Verse 8, for instance, reminds us that Abraham left Ur and journeyed to far-away Canaan “by faith” (Heb. 11:8). This was no easy feat for the patriarch. He was elderly and well established when he heard the Lord’s call (Gen. 12:4), and he had to leave behind almost everything he knew and many of his comforts to go to a land he had never seen. This was great faith indeed, for who could make such a journey apart from confident trust in our Creator?

Abraham not only believed in God; he believed God. He had not the faith of demons, who know God exists, but saving faith that reveals itself through obedience to the Lord (James 2:14–26). We better understand the greatness of the patriarch’s faith when we see that Abraham remained a stranger on the earth even during his time in Canaan (Heb. 11:13). He never owned any part of the Promised Land except his burial plot (Gen. 23), so from a worldly perspective he foolishly left everything behind in Ur. But Abraham was no fool. He bought the plot in confidence that the land would be his, that he would inherit it at the resurrection. Placing his bones there was a kind of deposit that showed his trust that he would finally receive his inheritance (Heb. 11:14–16; see also vv. 17–19, 22). 



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Many people in this world will regard us as fools for leaving everything behind for God. So often, the sacrifices that we make do not lead to any evident reward in this life, so it is easy for earthly minded people to believe Christianity is a fool’s game. Yet, we know that the Lord will bless us abundantly at His return for all that we have given up for His sake (Mark 10:29–31).

And as these heavenly treasures cannot be lost, we actually make the wisest decision possible when we follow Christ.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Esther 4:1–5:2
Daniel 6
Matthew 14:22–33
1 Timothy 6:17–19

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Exodus 14–16
Matthew 15:1–28

EXAMPLES OF FAITH

HEBREWS 11:23–12:2 “Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight” (11:32–34).



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

Jesus says that servants are not greater than their master. If He suffered for His faithfulness to God, His disciples will also suffer for trusting in Him and living by His Word (John 15:18–27). If we share His vocation on earth, however, it follows that we will share in the glory He received for fulfilling His Father’s will and trusting Him without fail (Phil. 2:5–11). Christ’s sure promise is that we will share in His glory (John 17:20–26). That is reason enough to trust Him even when it is hard to do so.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Jeremiah 17:14–18
Matthew 5:10
Acts 6:8–7:60
2 Timothy 3:12

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Exodus 17–19
Matthew 15:29–16:4

Habakkuk 2:4 serves a critical role in Paul’s explanation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The Apostle quotes it as the key prooftext for demonstrating that eternal life is granted to those who trust in Christ and not in themselves for their righteousness before God (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). Consequently, Habakkuk’s way of life can also help us understand the nature of saving faith. Note that in Habakkuk 3:17–19, the prophet affirms his trust in our Creator even if he should suffer crushing poverty. Clearly, we should understand that authentic faith holds fast to the Lord no matter one’s outward circumstances. Those who possess saving faith trust in God not only in plenty but also in want.

The Lord graciously blesses His people, and we should not be ashamed to enjoy His good gifts. Yet as suffering and hardship are often God’s means for refining and strengthening our faith, we must remember that faith really proves itself in times of great adversity. The author of Hebrews demonstrates this in today’s passage, as he places a special highlight on those who trusted God in the midst of the greatest difficulties imaginable. Certainly, many old covenant saints accomplished great things through trusting in God (Heb. 11:32–34). Many of these same saints and others, however, persevered in faith during periods of tremendous pain. Moses did not take the easy way out of holding on to his status as an Egyptian prince; rather, he embraced exile and later opposed the strongest king on earth. He did so because he trusted in God and by faith identified himself with the covenant community (11:24–28; see Ex. 2:11–12:51). He left the temporary pleasures of worldly wealth and fame for the sake of eternal blessings that were yet unseen. Only by faith could he have done this.

Other old covenant saints did the same, enduring death, dismemberment, scourging, homelessness, and much more (Heb. 11:35–37). To the spiritually blind, this appears to be foolishness. But in God’s view, “the world was not worthy” of these faithful men and women (v. 38).

God’s evaluation, of course, is the only one that matters. The world remains unworthy of those who persevere in faith. As we press forward in trusting in the Lord even when it is most difficult, we are conformed to the image of Christ, who did the same (12:1–2). Moreover, like Him we will finally receive the joy set before us. **TC**

GOD’S GIFT TO HIS PEOPLE

EPHESIANS 2:1–10 “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (vv. 8–10).

One of the signature confessions of the Reformed tradition, the Westminster Confession of Faith stands out for its comprehensive summary of biblical doctrine. Chapter 14 of this confession deals with saving faith, explaining that “the grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts” (14.1). This statement asserts that faith, although it is something we exercise, does not find its origin ultimately in our will or in our cooperation with divine grace. Instead, saving faith is a gift to us from the Holy Spirit. He is its ultimate origin, and we exercise faith because of His work in our hearts. It follows that since the Holy Spirit is omnipotent, we will not fail to possess faith if He works it in our hearts. Salvation from beginning to end is guaranteed by the Spirit, who gives us faith and sustains it forever.

The confession draws on Ephesians 2:1–10 at this point. Verse 8 is key, telling us that we have been saved by grace through faith, and that “this” is not our own doing. But to what does the term “this” refer? Is it grace? Is it faith? Is it both?

Conceptually speaking, grace is by nature a gift, so it seems odd that “this” would refer exclusively to grace. If so, then Paul would be saying that the gift of grace is a gift; this is redundant. But if the term “this” refers to grace and to faith, we find no redundancy. The entire package of grace and faith is a gift of God, and it makes far more sense for Paul to have to tell us explicitly that grace and faith are gifts than it would be to tell us that only grace is a gift. We already knew that grace was a gift before we read Paul’s letter.

Grammatically speaking, the Greek of the passage can have the whole package of grace and faith as the antecedent to which “this” refers, and the rest of Scripture confirms that the gift Paul speaks of must include our faith. Only those who are “born again” can see the kingdom, Jesus says (John 3:3). We cannot even see the kingdom, let alone enter it by faith, unless and until the Spirit changes our hearts. We are first born again; then, and only then, will we believe in Jesus.

Ephesians 2:1 says that we are dead in sin apart from Christ. God must draw us, and when He draws a person to Him, He does so effectually. Everyone whom He draws He raises up at the last day (John 6:44). Faith is God’s gift to us, and if He gives it to us, we will possess it forever. **TC**



CORAM DEO

Living before the face of God

That faith is the gift of God is some of the best news we could ever receive. If faith is God’s gift to us, we do not have to depend on our own fervor or strength for our salvation. Since God is omnipotent, the only kind of faith He can give is persevering faith, faith that is strong enough to press through every doubt and trial. The faith we have is of divine origin, so we can look with confidence to Christ that He will keep us safe forever in and by this faith.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy 30:6
Jeremiah 31:33–34
John 20:11–18
James 1:18

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Genesis 20–22
Matthew 16:5–28



ROMANS 10:17 "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."



CORAM DEO

*Living before the
face of God*

Without the proper diet, our bodies will be weak and sickly. The same is true of our faith. If we do not nourish it regularly, we will be tossed about by every wind of doubt, and we will fall into sin more readily. We feed our faith by hearing the preaching and teaching of God's Word. This is the proper diet that the Lord has ordained for our souls. Let us take as many opportunities as we can to hear the Word of God so that we will grow strong in our faith.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah 55:10–11
Romans 16:25–27

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

Exodus 23–24
Matthew 17

THE WEEKEND

Exodus 25–28
Matthew 18:1–20

Saving faith is a gift from our Creator Himself, given only to His elect, who are certain to persevere until the end of life. Texts such as John 6:44 and Ephesians 2:1–10 reveal this precious truth, which is why the Westminster Confession of Faith stresses the work of the Spirit in bringing us to faith (14.1). Yet this is not all that the Westminster Confession says about the supernatural character of faith. God most often works through ordinary means, and so He does not usually give His elect faith apart from certain means that He has established. As Westminster Confession 14.1 says, faith "is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word: by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened."

Note the emphasis on Scripture as the means by which faith is wrought. The confession acknowledges that the teaching and preaching of Scripture are the ways that the Holy Spirit works faith in us. God's work of regeneration is required if we are to believe (John 3:3–8; Eph. 1:3–10; 2:1–10), yet He calls us to faith through the preaching of the gospel. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). Our Lord saves us through what Paul refers to as a foolish message (1 Cor. 1:21), namely, "Christ crucified," a truth foreshadowed in the Old Testament and made plain in the New Testament (vv. 22–24). When the Word of God is proclaimed faithfully, God's Spirit accompanies it to change the hearts of His chosen and make them receptive to the message (Ps. 119:18; 2 Peter 1:21). He illumines the meaning of His Word, penetrates our souls with the knowledge of our sin and our only hope of salvation in Christ, and elicits our faith in the Savior.

If we would have strong faith, then, the most important thing we can do is hear the preaching and teaching of God's Word as often as we can. As the Word is preached in corporate worship, the Spirit generates faith in those who do not yet believe and strengthens the faith of those who are already saved. But God also calls people to faith and builds them up when God's Word is taught in other settings: at home, in the classroom, in Bible studies, in ordinary conversation, and elsewhere. Jesus strengthened the faith of His disciples by teaching them the living and active Word of God (Luke 17:5–6; Heb. 4:12–13). Today, He uses the same Word to make us mature in the faith.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

ROBERT ROTHWELL

For about fifteen years or so, the phrase "people of faith" has been common in American political discourse. I am sure we will hear it this year as the various candidates in the U.S. presidential race talk about the "people of faith" who support them. We might see groups such as "People of Faith for (Name the Candidate)" working to get their preferred candidate elected.

Two assumptions behind the phrase "people of faith" concern me. First, it implies that there is a group we could call "people of no faith." If we must note specifically that there are "people of faith" in our culture, it follows that there are "people of no faith." Otherwise, the qualifier "of faith" would be unnecessary. The political action group could be named "People for (Name the Candidate)" because everyone in the group would have faith.

Yet to make a distinction between "people of faith" and "people of no faith" is rather pointless. After all, there is no such thing as a person of no faith. All human beings place their ultimate trust—their faith—in something, whether a deity, an earthly leader, or even their own abilities.

As concerning as it is to imply that some people have no faith, I am more troubled by the second thing this phrase assumes. We see that the people to which the phrase refers have faith, but it does not say what kind of faith they have. Is it Christian faith? Muslim faith? Jewish faith? Buddhist faith? Ostensibly, the phrase designates religious people, but it does not tell us what the religion of these people happens to be. It is generic, intended to cover any and all who claim it.

That is intentional, as the goal is to get a

significant number of devout people to set aside their dogma and unite for a common cause. Religious distinctives are papered over because they are seen as less important than what really binds people of faith together—the mere fact that they believe.

Certainly, it is not wrong to work to protect life side by side with someone who is not a Christian. To the extent that I and a Muslim agree that abortion is wrong, for example, I can work with him to end legalized abortion on demand. But there is a way to do this without making the content of faith generic and indifferent. Indeed, we must not make the content of faith indifferent, for that insults people whose beliefs about God are fundamentally incompatible with ours. What right do I have to say to the Muslim, "We really believe the same things about God," when he says that we do not?

More importantly, Jesus tells us that the content of faith matters. All people have faith in something, but we are not saved simply by having faith. We are saved only if we have the correct object of faith. No one can come to the Father except through Jesus (John 14:6). If we are not people of faith in Jesus, we will be lost for all eternity.

Choosing the object of faith cannot be reduced to personal preference, such as picking red clam chowder over white clam chowder or a blue car over a green one. It is a matter of saving truth. The wrong object of faith will save no one.

ROBERT ROTHWELL is associate editor of *Tabletalk* and an adjunct instructor for Reformation Bible College. He is writing the *Tabletalk* daily devotionals on Mark this year.



THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM

In the face of scorn and disbelief, Jesus Christ announced His kingdom. In the face of hatred and death, He demonstrated its power. In this twelve-lecture series, Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson explains how the Sermon on the Mount equips us to live a kingdom life in a fallen world. Dr. Ferguson highlights Christ's exhortations to live counterculturally, to examine the deeper implications of God's law, and to rest in the knowledge of God as Father.


DVDs (2)
\$43.20
\$48
SER06DC

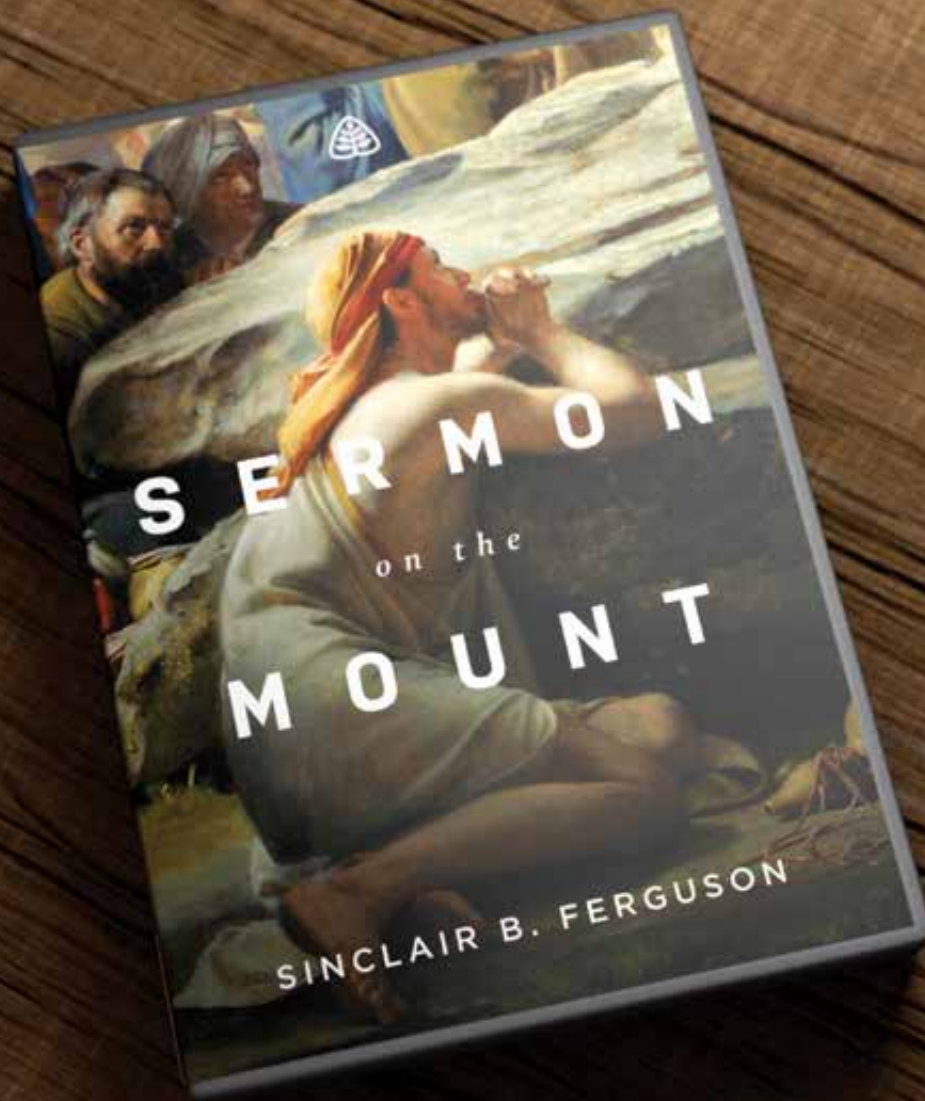

CDs (4)
\$27.90
\$34
SER06CC


**STUDY
GUIDE**
\$12
SER06U


ONLINE COURSE
**Sermon on
the Mount**
Ligonier.org/connect



Ligonier.org | 800.435.4343





FOR THE CHURCH

Training Pastors

IVER MARTIN

HOW IMPORTANT IS your pastor's training? If we believe in having ministers who preach, teach, and relate to the varied and many needs within our congregations, thorough training, as with any profession, is indispensable. Yet, for a variety of reasons, in the eyes of some Christians, theological education is at best negotiable and at worst dispensable. Some argue that Jesus' disciples, despite not having had a theological education, became the most effective communicators of the gospel ever, just from having been "with Jesus." So, accordingly, it follows that theological education is an unnecessary complication that gets in the way of the church's real progress. Besides, in many places where churches are becoming weaker and less able to provide funding for seminary training, it is being suggested that preparation should be reduced to only "the essentials." Others tell us that, in a post-Christian world dominated by secular resistance to the church, we need to "just get out there," the implication being that seminaries are largely irrelevant.

Yet, when we think about what the church is and what we expect from Sunday worship, the ministry of the Word lies at the core. It follows, therefore, that if pas-

tors are expected to meet the expectations of their people and fulfill their calling, they must know the Bible thoroughly and be able to communicate its truths skillfully. Furthermore, if we believe that mission is making disciples of all nations, as Jesus taught, then as the church goes out with the gospel, we must be grounded in biblical doctrine as well as equipped to communicate it. Interestingly, New Testament mission always included the substance of the faith as well as a presentation of the cross and an invitation to believe. Indeed, the first official mission to which the Apostle Paul was called was not to confront an unbelieving world with the cross but to teach the church in Antioch after they had come to faith (Acts 11:26).

The right kind of training will first of all provide students with the tools that they need to become thoroughly acquainted with the Scriptures. This includes a familiarity (to a greater or lesser degree) with biblical languages (Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek). Then, a good seminary will have, at its heart, the kind of theological teaching in which students will engage with major biblical doctrines. As the Bible points us upward to God, a grasp of systematic theology will, by piec-

ing together the biblical data, bring us to a proper understanding of God's attributes: His being, power, knowledge, and holiness. As the Bible points back to the cross, theology will seek to explore central issues such as sacrifice, atonement, reconciliation, purification of sin, and justification. As the Bible commands the church to move out with the gospel, a historical and theological perspective will force us to ask how God has guided the church over two thousand years, what the gospel is, and how it can best be communicated. In addition, pastoral and practical theology will introduce students to a wide variety of contemporary issues that ministers are likely to meet in everyday church life.

It is a serious mistake to assume that past challenges in the church cannot reappear, albeit in a different variant. Is the resurrection of Jesus a myth? Can we really believe that miracles happened? What do we mean by the Bible's being God's inerrant and infallible Word? Today's church wrestles with whether Adam was a real historical person and the denial of penal substitution in the death of Christ. These issues deserve thorough, rational exploration that can only be undertaken from a knowledgeable theological perspective.

When it comes to relevance, our seminaries must never become merely academic institutions. Instead, a live connection to churches should be maintained in which churches' needs and challenges can be understood. In addition, students have to be made aware of trends in cultural thinking so that they can be trained in how to communicate the Bible in today's language in today's world without com-

promising the message of God's Word.

To effectively reach today's skeptical unbelievers does not mean less theology. If anything, it means more. If we believe that mankind in every generation has the imprint of God upon his soul, we should expect people, in responding to the gospel, to engage in a process of rational questioning about the content of the Christian faith in all its complexity.

A truly healthy church is one in which its members are theologians, coming to church each Sunday with a readiness to think and learn, with an insatiable appetite for more. A good pulpit ministry will richly edify God's people. It is fatal to underestimate the perceptiveness of our congregations. As

people discover what it means to follow Jesus, the intellect often comes to life and the gospel produces a hunger for knowledge that a pastor should be well equipped to satisfy.

To suggest that today's pastors do not need rigorous seminary training because the disciples did not have it is a spurious argument. Their time with Jesus was a three-year intensive course, complete with internship and testing, and in which they discovered the Scriptures as never before. If the church in the twenty-first century is to thrive, it will depend on high-quality pulpit ministry and well-equipped pastoral skill. If training for the ministry comes at a high price, it is worth it. The church cannot afford otherwise. 

REV. IVER MARTIN is principal of Edinburgh Theological Seminary in Scotland and a minister in the Free Church of Scotland.



Living Reasonably in an Unreasonable Age

DON BAILEY

BEFORE MY CALL to pastoral ministry, I worked in a family garden center business. There I witnessed firsthand the growth of the modern consumer mentality. In the 1980s, large garden center chain stores had adopted the 100 percent money-back guarantee for a customer's dead plant. Soon, our small family business met with more demanding and unreasonable customers. A man would approach our storefront with a dead azalea and a soured countenance. "Do you think," I might ask, "that while you were in the Bahamas, your plant might have suffered a lack of water?" The angry retort would invariably follow, "You sold me a bad plant, and I want a new one!" Truthfully, we had always given another plant to such a customer in the past. But the former gift of grace became the customer's right of entitlement.

When the Apostle Paul writes to the Philippians in 4:5, "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone," he entreats believers to lay down selfish entitlement attitudes. The word translated "reasonable" is sometimes rendered "gentle" or "moderate." This does not mean moderate in passion for God's honor and the cause of Christ. Nor does it mean gentle as a doormat when civic

rights are assaulted. Remember Paul's assertion of his rights as a Roman citizen in Acts 22? Instead, the Apostle urges that we lay aside the notion that we need to exercise our advantages to the detriment of others. Unreasonableness leads to the kind of personal friction he addresses in this epistle between Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2–3).

How might Christians live reasonably before all men in this increasingly unreasonable age? To begin with, we should continually cast our gaze upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul soars with this thought in Philippians 2:5–11: how truly amazing it is that the very Son of God, with all of the rights of deity, did not press His divine rights in His humanity. But being born in the likeness of men, he took on the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

This same Jesus was so confident of His own authority that He washed the feet of His disciples (John 13:1–11). He did this as a living demonstration of this divine reasonableness that serves others before demanding service (Mark 10:45). In doing so, He impressed upon His disciples that His kingdom is not one of lording

authority over others for personal aggrandizement (Matt. 20:25; Mark 10:42; Luke 22:25).

Unless we continually place our faith in the person of Jesus Christ as He is presented in the Gospels, we will never make sense of laying aside our consumer mentality in our families, churches, and greater community. We must know—and remind ourselves—that Jesus experienced death and hell for our sakes before we will give up the self-seeking advantage of this world. We will live as new creations of a different sort than our pagan neighbors only when the fuel of our gospel imaginations remind us that our feet were dangling singed over the fires of hell, and that we have been liberated from the futile ways handed down by our forefathers (1 Peter 1:18).

Living reasonably before all men begins at home. The Apostle Paul follows his exhortation to believers to make known our reasonableness with these words: "The Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5). Commentators debate whether Paul had in mind primarily the temporal nearness of the Lord in His imminent return or the omnipresence of the Lord as a reminder that He is close in His abiding presence. Both are undoubtedly true and certainly not mutually exclusive.

Yet we should also think pastorally in application. The Lord's sanctifying work shines brightest before those nearest us. We who have been bought with a price

should make known our reasonableness to husbands and wives, parents and children, coworkers and neighbors. When a husband seeks the honor of Christ ahead of his own wife's submission, his wife will more likely respect him. We will make known the sacrificial nature of Jesus when we bear burdens with those who share our pew in worship. Likewise, the consistent thread of New Testament instruction

on how to live before an unbelieving world stresses the down-to-earth duties of prayer, love, good deeds, wisdom, tranquility, hard work, and sacrifice (Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:11; 1 Peter 2:12, 14–15).

An adage I heard in seminary with respect to preaching the gospel is apt in applying Philippians 4:5 to our everyday lives: "If you aim at everyone, you speak to no one. Aim at someone, and you speak to everyone." It is far easier and more glamorous to aim at changing the world than serving those at

hand. Ask, "Where am I over-pressing my sense of need at the expense of others?"

Repent daily. Protect the weak. Sacrifice comfort. Forgive neighbors. Love enemies. Practice generosity. When we believers relinquish our perceived "due" and find rest in the grand privileges we possess as sons and daughters of God, the light of the gospel beams brightly before a desperate and dark world. 

REV. DON BAILEY is associate pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla.

The Gospel



LIGONIER

2016 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

*W. ROBERT GODFREY, IAN HAMILTON, STEVEN LAWSON,
ALBERT MOHLER, STEPHEN NICHOLS, MICHAEL REEVES,
and R.C. SPROUL*



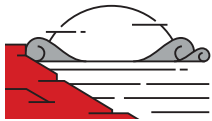
FEBRUARY 25–27 : ORLANDO, FL : FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

LIGONIER.ORG/CONFERENCES : 800-435-4343

ATTEND THE CONFERENCE FOR FREE WHEN YOU CRUISE WITH US

**2016 Caribbean Study Cruise
Apologetics**

FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 6



Thinking about Change

CHRISTIANS IN A SHIFTING WORLD

AS CHRISTIANS, WE LOOK with ultimate hope to our ultimate future—the sure hope that we will be with God forever in a world free of sin and all its ugly effects. Christ will return, and what He has prepared for us will be more glorious than all we can ask or even imagine. It's the immediate future that causes us anxiety, though. Our future and the futures of our children and grandchildren—these trouble us and cause us to fear.

We live in a world where one of the few constants in life is change. Yet, God has given us the ability, the desire, and the mandate to change and shape the world around us. Since the beginning, man has been doing this by creating and implementing new technologies. Technologies are good in that they allow us to carry out our God-given

mandate (Gen. 4). But every technology also brings risk; it brings change. Innovations subtly shift our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. They lead us to form new customs and new habits. We have an uneasy relationship with technology, since we create technologies in our image and over time they tend to return the favor.

Historically, the pace of technological change has been slow. But over the past five hundred years that pace has consistently increased. Today we can hardly keep up. By the time we purchase and enjoy a great new gadget, the next one (and the one after that) is already being finalized and perfected in the labs. The newest, greatest, and most expensive device is built with a planned obsolescence that may be only

three or four years away. It seems like every year or two we need to prepare our families and our churches for another big shift, another great innovation, that will call them to learn new skills and adapt to new realities.

With all of the changes—not to mention the speed at which they occur—we can develop a deep uncertainty about the future. Whatever we know about our current situation, the future will be very different. We know that we cannot predict future changes with any degree of accuracy. After all, the technologies we consider so normal today existed only in the realm of science fiction just twenty short years ago. And as a result, many Christians have a nascent fear of the future, wondering what it may hold both for them and their families.

Understanding the past allows us to identify trends and to see that even though the pace may have changed, the pattern has not. Seeing history through the lens of God's Word comforts us with the sure knowledge that all change is unfolding only and exactly within God's good and perfect will.

The history of communication is especially compelling. Consider, for example, ancient Roman roads. Roman roads were a marvelous innovation that held the empire together. They were built to quickly transport mighty armies across the empire, to expand Roman influence to new lands, and to crush any hint of rebellion in lands already conquered. And, of course, they were built to consolidate the

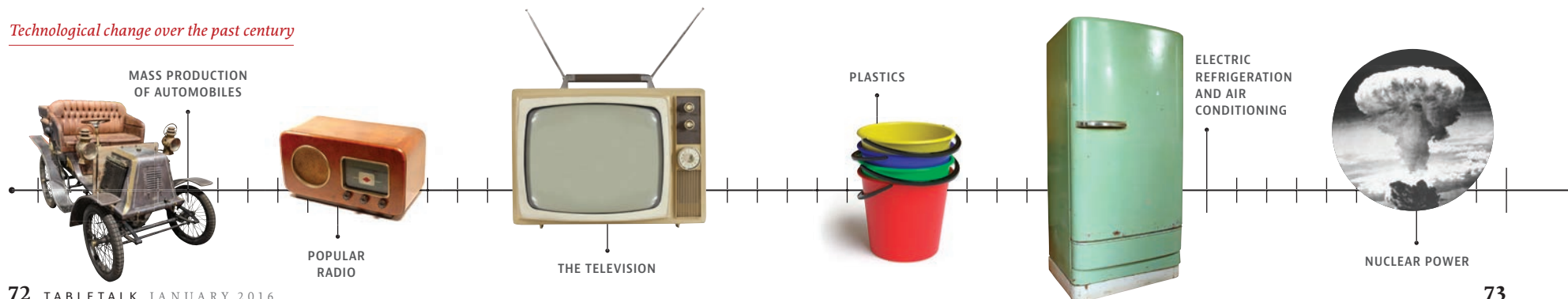
empire through trade and communications. They were incredibly effective, and Rome's empire thrived for centuries. But the very same roads that carried soldiers also carried the first Christian missionaries to their destinations all over the Mediterranean. The technology that was meant to extend Rome's kingdom was used to extend God's kingdom. And only one of those kingdoms

**WE CAN DEVELOP
A DEEP
UNCERTAINTY
ABOUT THE FUTURE.
WHATEVER WE
KNOW ABOUT
OUR CURRENT
SITUATION, WE
KNOW THE FUTURE
WILL BE VERY
DIFFERENT.**

continues to exist today.

Consider the book as well. The book—printed pages bound between two covers—is a relatively new innovation, a new technology. For the vast majority of human history, the book as such did not exist. King David never read a book. Jesus

Technological change over the past century





never read a book. They read scrolls. The book as we know it today is a product of developments in the centuries after Christ's life. First the *codex*, an ancient form of the modern book, was invented, and then the printing press was invented many centuries later. Yet the book has become so deeply embedded in our society that we cannot imagine the world without it. We even call the Bible a *book*, as if it had always existed in this format.

It seems comical now, but when the book was introduced to society, people feared it, just as they had feared the rise of writing centuries earlier. People feared that the book would take ideas too far, too fast. They tied knowledge so closely with memorization that they feared the ramifications of recording words on paper instead of in human minds. After all, why would we ever want to store something in our memories if we can store it on paper? And yet today we can see how the book was used to record God's Word and to spread it across the world. We can see that it sparked a great Reformation. We can see that it sparked revival and awakening. We can see that the Bible quickly

became the best-selling book of all time. That technology changed the world. God used that technology for His own purposes.

When the radio was introduced, many people feared it. They feared its intrusion into their homes and families. They feared the consequences of families gathering in the living room to listen to the radio instead of sitting on the front porch to socialize with neighbors. They feared

the fast-paced flow of information and the news that came from so far outside their local context.

But again, we can see how God used this technology for His own glory. Countless people have come to faith in Jesus Christ by

hearing the gospel on the radio. Countless more have been encouraged in their Christian walk as they have listened to *Renewing Your Mind* or *Grace to You* or a host of other great programs. Even today, when radio is regarded as an antiquated technology, it continues to make a deep impact across the globe, and it continues to be used by God to carry out the Great Commission.

Television provides another ready example. There is no doubt that televi-

sion transformed the family and brought with it changing morals. Yet Christians quickly identified how television could be used to transmit the Good News to the lost and to encourage those who had already been saved. Today we take it for granted that we can watch our favorite teachers and preachers on a screen. It is yet another new technology that brought both risk and great benefits as Christians saw the potential and used it to God's glory.

Today we are at the dawn of the digital revolution, and we are grappling with many of the very same fears people faced at the dawn of every other communications revolution. We fear the ubiquity of digital devices; we fear living so much of our lives

in the glow of little screens; we fear the consequences of recording our thoughts and our lives in apps. But even now we can have hope. We can look to history to see how God has used every technology to carry out his purposes and to do His will. We can look to God's Word to see that He works all things to His glory. We can have firm confidence that He is over and above and working through all of these things.

It is good and wise for us, as Christians, to consider deeply all of the change going on around us—and within us. It is good for us to consider what happens when the “Good Book” becomes the “Good App,” or when so many of the things we used to do face-to-face become things we do through bits and bytes. It is good for us to keep a wary eye on new technologies and to introduce them to our families and our churches only after due consideration of both their risks and their

benefits. We acknowledge that both we and our technologies exist in this sin-stained world, so we should examine them with discernment and consider all we stand to gain or lose. But even as we act with this kind of wisdom, we can act with confidence. We have no reason to fear.

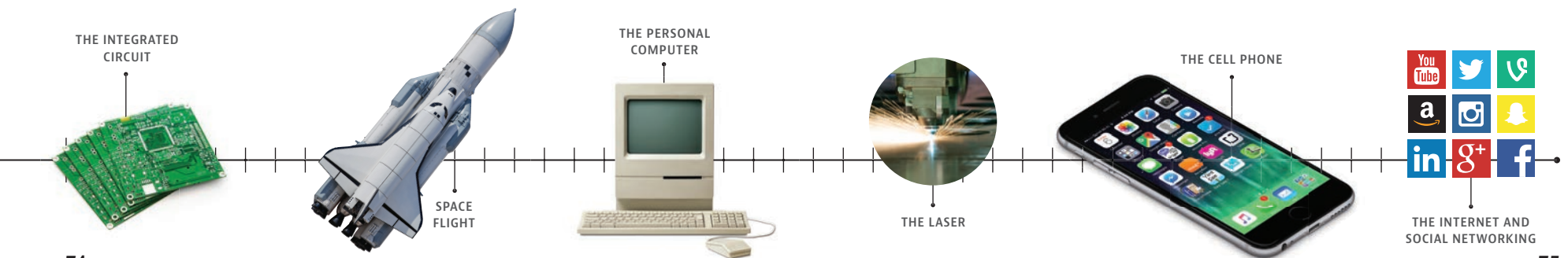
We do not know the

future, but as the saying goes, we do know the One who holds the future. And not only do we know that, we know what God is accomplishing in history. We know the end to which God is directing history. We know who will bring this world's history to its beautiful conclusion. **TC**

TIM CHALLIES is founding blogger of *Challies.com*, a pastor at Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto, and author of *The Next Story*.

GOD USES TECHNOLOGY FOR HIS OWN PURPOSES, AND HE USES IT FOR HIS OWN GLORY.

WE HAVE NO REASON TO FEAR. WE KNOW WHO WILL BRING THIS WORLD'S HISTORY TO ITS BEAUTIFUL CONCLUSION.



The Gospel



LIGONIER

2016 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

*W. ROBERT GODFREY, IAN HAMILTON, STEVEN LAWSON,
ALBERT MOHLER, STEPHEN NICHOLS, MICHAEL REEVES,
and R.C. SPROUL*

FEBRUARY 25–27 : ORLANDO, FL : FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

LIGONIER.ORG/CONFERENCES : 800-435-4343

from Ligonier Ministries and Dr. R. C. Sproul | 800-435-4343 or WWW.LIGONIER.ORG | Next Month: Awakening

T A B L E T A L K